~~CHAPTER ONE~~

Chapter Seven (1)

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The first thing I did was call all the officers together. We met in the clubhouse, the place I had helped build a decade earlier, when the sayeret was still just a gleam in Avraham Arnan's eye.

We had been a unit with *potential* back then. Avraham never doubted that. But we hadn't *done* yet anything. Now, we faced a new and very different challenge. Avraham's hopes and expectations for his unit had been more than met. Sayeret Matka~~l~~, supported by the tech unit, (the Helicopter's squadrons), and the leadership of Meit Amit had (almost singlehandedly) restored fighting unit-like ~~the~~ morale, and operational effectiveness, of Israeli M~~m~~ilitary I~~i~~ntelligence. Time and again, operations which we *said* that we could do – dismissed as too dangerous, or

impossible, by others – proved achievable. Not without mistakes, close calls and many lessons for future ops. but wWe had done them. Yet I was certain, as I told the team leaders and our other officers, that this was no longer enough.

Our intelligence operations still mattered. In fact, we would have to “push further,” I told them. Deeper across Arab borders. Deeper into our enemies’ communications systems. Our intercept operations had given Israel an important military edge in 1967. I assumed – only partially correctnaively, it would turn outut – that they would prove even more critical in the nextany future war.

Intelligence could no longer be all that we did, however. If the sayeret was to retain its unique role, I was convinced we had to beto make sure we are the best, not just when the challenge is to prepare for half a year ,a one night clandestine operation, however complicated. But also when a sudden new fighting challenge, that had never been faced before, where you will *have to* ***shoot***, has to be executed at the best possible way (even it is short of perfect) within a ***limited*** timeframe set by the circumstances. I explicitly wanted us to inherit the role of unit 101 or Company A of

Meir Har-zion from some 17 years ago. ~~capable of not just bugging, but fighting. We would have to become a full-fledged *military* special-forces unit~~, or to be like the SAS(which was our example to start with) in Britain. Or ~~, if circumstances demanded,~~ like the French commandos I'd trained with in the Pyrenees. We do not need this capability and recognition in our fighting skills just for reasons of prestige, I told the officers. It relates to our clandestine operations as well. We are always exposed to the risk of turning, during intelligence operation, from bugging team into a fighting team within split of a second. That's won't work at the moment of truth if the team is not self confident and commanders are not actually experienced in real live fire fighting. Another~~One~~ reason for this, I didn't even have to mention: everyone in the sayeret knew that in spite of daring raids plans for the first night (which were cancelled as a result of the rolling success of the Air Force) and genuine enthusiasm to participate, The Unit ended almost as ~~as a pure intelligence unit, we'd been relegated to little more than~~ bystanders in the Six-Day War, Israel's most serious conflict since the– end of 48' war~~establishment of the state~~. We could not afford it to happen again [explain?,EB].

~~But that, to me, wasn't the main argument for change. It was my experiences *since* the war. The fact that Israel was facing new, less easily defined and less easily confronted challenges to its security.~~

~~In the War of Attrition, we may not have lost a single inch of territory. But we *had* lost tanks and planes. Some of our soldiers and pilots were still being held prisoner in Egypt and Syria. Yasir Arafat's Fatah and the other armed Palestinian groups might not present a *conventional* threat to our security. Yet they were now fighting a full-scale civil war in Jordan. And that conflict had been ignited by a multiple hijacking in September 1970 – a reminder that they were increasingly turning to *non-conventional* warfare: to acts of terror. In confronting these new challenges – freeing the captive Israeli soldiers, for instance, or dealing with terrorism – our regular armed forces had limited options. They were built for defeating other regular armies. Israel did, however, have a unit with the proven qualities – initiative, imagination, brains, brashness – to provide an answer. They had Sayeret Matkal. *If* we could adapt ourselves to a new and expanded role.~~

"We're not starting from scratch," I said, and I could see some of the officers literally nodding in

agreement. The Unit participated in a raid on Beirut International Airport, exploding several Jetliners in 68’, together with parachutist units when, and in Karameh in 68’ then the raid on Island of Grin in 69’[worth being told.EB] I’ve commanded the first out of two operations we did over the Canal, using our crossing skills. We even participated, Dovik, Uzi Yairi and Myself, each commanding a separate part in a retaliation operation back in 64’. But all this were part of a bigger operations with several units and The Unit felt a sort of appendix that was added under pressure, rather than a natural choice for the toughest job. This brief history was basically known to all in the room. We had a record of success now, built up under Avraham and the four other commanders before me. And as the first commander ~~st head~~ of the sayeret to have risen from within the unit itself, I told them that the challenges are still immense and continuously changing, in order to succeed, what would matter most was to build on the qualities that had proved all our doubters wrong in our intelligence operations. “We have to stay true to the *spirit* of Sayeret Matkal,” I said. Every one of the officers knew what I meant: ~~informality,~~ the emphasis on teamwork ,and team bond ,formed along tough and demanding challenges and

tests, leading to tight ‘human cell’ were the commitment to each other, to the principle of “we don’t return, if mission is not accomplished” and to the norms set through those trials, The commitment overcomes fear or any physical obstacle. the value we placed on informality, brains and creativity, not just~~more than~~ formal lines of authority as long as we are planning, but unity in action. The rigor we applied to training, preparing for~~, and executing~~ every mission; the expectation of initiative and highly adaptive spirit to make sure mission is accomplished. – and, just as importantly,critical, honest, sometimes cruel, debriefing process –to identify~~to criticizing, and trying to fix~~ , every aspect of what we’d done wrong, or failed to anticipate. That’s creates a virtous cycle of continuous operation-based improvement.

I did not mentioned it to my officers, but as a young Lt. Col. Who just started to look at the wider picture as relevant to him I watched my experiences *since* the war. The fact that Israel was facing new, less easily defined and less easily confronted challenges to its security.

In the War of Attrition, we may not have lost a single inch of territory. But we *had* lost around 800 soldiers, more than in 67’, we lost tanks and planes. Some of our soldiers and pilots were still being held prisoner

in Egypt and Syria. Yasir Arafat's Fatah and the other armed Palestinian groups might not present a *conventional* threat to our security. Yet they were now fighting a full-scale civil war in Jordan [Check dates. EB I've got after black September 70']. And that conflict had been ignited by a multiple hijacking in September 1970 – a reminder that they were increasingly turning to *non-conventional* warfare: to acts of terror. In confronting these new challenges – freeing the captive Israeli soldiers, for instance, or dealing with terrorism – our regular armed forces had limited options. They were built for defeating other regular armies. Israel did, however, have a unit with the proven qualities – initiative, imagination, brains, brashness – to provide an answer. They had Sayeret Matkal. *If* we could adapt ourselves to a new and expanded role.]]

Though I expected to be leading many of the operations myself, I knew that, like all the previous commanders, I'd have to rely on the strengths of the officers around me. I was incredibly fortunate on that score. Almost all~~Some~~ of them, I already knew well, from my time as Menachem Digli's deputy. Open minded~~Smart~~, self-confident, *self-starting(?)* officers like Amiram

Levin, the stocky kibbutznik from the north with whom I'd worked most closely and most often as deputy. And of course, Avshalom Horan – Avsha. He was the guy who'd convinced me to risk completing our mission on the road from Suez to Cairo. There was also Giora Zorea, who had come through the ranks of the unit and had already been a team leader when I was deputy. And Danny Yatom. Born not far from Mishmar Hasharon, but a city boy, from Netanya, Danny became my own deputy during my first nine or 10 months in command.There was Alik Ron. A younger generation were Amitai Nachmani, Amit Ben Horin, then Dany Brunner and Shay Agmon.[few words about each?.EB]

There were two others as well, both related to Moshe Dayan, but with a calm, confident intelligence all of their own: Uzi Dayan, son of Moshe's brother, who had been killed in the 1948 war when Uzi was only months old; and Mookie Betzer, who was married to Uzi's– cousin (?)~~half-sister~~. I'm not sure which of the two joined the sayeret first.Uzi ~~–Mookie~~, I believe.

But the family ties~~,~~ _ far from extraordinary, were part of how Sayeret Matkal had grown up – in a way, a part of the "spirit" I'd been insistent we would have to retain. In the early days, it had mostly been friends bringing friends, as in the old Palmach, or Arik's Unit

101 and Meir Har-Zion's Company A in the parachutists. But also, not infrequently, cousin bringing cousin, or brother bringing brother ,(two of my three brothers served in The Unit, one of them became later an officer in Sayeret Shaked, the fourth one served in Sayeret Tzanhanim) (Danny Yatom also had his younger brother in the Unit. There were nany other cases later on and in this regard the Netanyahus could be mentioned as well. They were three.)).

[Ned , none of the Netanyahus was there at the start. Bibi came back from officers school only few months later. And Yoni did not show up before I almost started my 2nd year of command. I think we should find a place to it, later. EB

[[This, in fact, was the case with two other of my officers, whom I knew less well at first but who would become key members of my team. In their case, it was the younger one who joined first. Binyamin Netanyahu – Bibi, as everyone called him – had been a member of Amiram Levin's team when I was Digli's deputy. He'd even been a part of one of our several – ~~thankfully harmless~~ – failures along the Ca~~ca~~nal, (before we managed to breach Egyptian communications with our tunnel) several successful intelligence operations on the other side of

the Canal were already behind us, including crossing with the dinghy boats on the cable.The first night I commanded the operation .Having with me a team of seven including Amiram, Uzi, Alik and Shay Agmon. Our intention was to abduct a 1-2 EGYPTIAN SOLDIERS, TO NEGOTIATE WIT THEM THE recovery of ours. We attacked a small military car ,but with the momentum it halted only 15 yards afar and within seconds before we could abduct any, all except two who were killed jumped into the fresh water canal which is just 2 meters from the road. Two days later, myself and Amiram left to the final preparation for an operation near the Iraqi border with Jordan, another operation, this time in order ti just kill some Egyptians along the road were launched. The force was identified by more alert Egyptians this time. Fire was opened from their side, our bank of the Canal responded, and an immediate withdwawl ordered. During which one of our officers Haim Ben Yonah was killed. One boat , with Bibi among others lost balance and he started to sink, having a heavy weights on him. ~~It was on our first attempt, with the SEALs, to cross the canal by rubber boats hooked to the nylon cord. Bibi's got tangled, and tipped him into the water. The current wasn't as bad as when Uri Zakai had come so near to death in the Jordan River on the Golan. But it was~~

~~strong enough.~~ Only the SEALs’ skills and devotion, and Bibi’s good~~extraordinary~~ mix of calm and endurance, averted a further disaster.

About three months after~~By the time~~ I arrived back at Kav Chamesh as commander, Bibi had taken charge of a team of his own, a training of about a year was the core preparation of a team, before it turns operational, making him one of the three (4-5) core, operational officers in the unit. From the early planning stages of a mission, through to the training and execution, I worked closely with the team commanders. In my second year as commander of The Unit~~But especially with~~ with Bibi as well~~,~~ since he was the newest to the role and needed it most. I’m just 8 years older but at this age its quite a difference. He was smart and assertive. He was physically tough. Even by the standards of the sayeret, he was self-confident. He also understood ~~my determination to broaden~~ what we did, by ~~and to~~ building Sayeret Matkal into a unique fighting special ~~military strike~~ force – which was one reason why, ~~soon after I took~~few months after he started to train his team ~~command,~~ he urged me to bring in his older brother as well. Bibi was 22 at the time. His brother – Yonatan, or Yoni – had led a company(platoon?) of paratroopers in the 1967 war, in the Golan Heights and get wounded in his

elbow before going off to Harvard~~university~~. “He wants to come back to the army, and he’s exactly the kind of officer you want,” Bibi said. “He’s the kind we need.”

Not only did I agree to bring him in for a chat. Unlike Bibi who was very practical and immediate, Not only did I agree to bring him in for a chat.Yoni was more contemplative, thoughtful personality, with interest in philosophy, poetry, history etc. But he clearly brought with him actual battle experience which few at The Unit had. ~~Not only did I agree to bring him in for a chat.~~ I brought him into the sayeret.I made him commander of the training group of teams, which he did for some six months, And when Danny Yatom left to train, as I had, as an armored corps officer, I made Yoni my deputy commander.Later on Yony became my Neighbor, and good friend.I really liked/loved him . The Netanyahu brothers were not just gifted and dedicated officers. And of course ~~They seemed almost~~ driven,like all others, to excel and to succeed. IN their case, t~~T~~hat quality, I sensed as I got to know both of them, did not come only from within. I think it came from their upbringing, their family background, and in particular from their father. Ben-Zion Miliekowsky, as he then was, studied at Hebrew University at the same time as my father, in the early 1930s, and

became an impassioned supporter of Ben-Gurion main right-wing Zionist rival, Ze’ev Jabotinsky. My father remembered him gathering bemused groups of fellow students during breaks from classes, standing on an upturned wooden box, proclaiming that the Arabs would never willingly accept a Jewish state and urging the establishment of a Jewish state from the Mediterranean all the way to the Trans Jordan ~~River~~. Ben-Zion followed Jabotinsky himself to the United States in 1940, becoming his personal secretary. When Jabotinsky died a few months later, he stayed as head of his support group in America.

It was through Bibi and Yoni that I got to know their father.Quite compelling figure. After the establishment of the state, he had led a frustrating existence. A specialist in medieval Jewish history, he did not find a place on the faculty at Hebrew University – convinced, perhaps with some reason, that his outspoken advocacy for Jabotinsky’s Zionism in a country defined by Ben-Gurion’s had frozen him out. Whatever the reason, he pursued his academic career in America, where both Yoni and Bibi spent a good part of their youth. Again, perhaps understandably, he remained bitter about what he felt were unfair, politically inspired, roadblocks to his academic advancement in Israel.

Though he would evenutally return to Israel after the fall of Yoni, he was still in the US, at Cornell University, at the time when his sons became leading officers in Sayeret Matkal. So there was a physical distance between father and sons. But what struck me, the more that I got to know both of them, was how large the father loomed in both of their lives. There was an overarching, almost adolescent, admiration, bordering on worship sometimes. I remember once remarking to Nava that unlike all of us who, somewhwere between 14-17, start to look at their parents/fathers as close, respected, senior members of the family, but basically , as equals; it was as if, despite all their ~~physical~~ self-confidence and intellectual capabilities, Bibi and Yoni were still joined to their father by some “mental umbilical cord”. They seemed sometimes weighted down by a struggle to live up to his expectations, and maybe to right the “wrongs” done to him and achieve the advancement and success the young State of Israel had denied him.EB]]

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For the first year of my command, we planned and trained and exercised as if we were already the broader

strike force I hoped we would become. But our operations were all still directed at intelligence targets. We did “push further.” Not just because that was one of the goals I’d set out from day-one. It was because changing circumstances left us no other choice. We got word (from the Mossad) and later watched that the Egyptians as well as Syrians had been shopping around in various European countries for electronic equipment that could detect our intercepts on their cables. The aim was to be able to monitor transmissions in a way that would allow them to know we were sending back signals to the growing forest of antennas we’d set up on Jebel Um-Hashiba in the Sinai. ~~And while the Syrians seemed less aware of our interception threats, maintaining our capability there presented other challenges.~~ Now that we controlled the Golan, installing the kind of T-junctions we’d used in Egypt was going to require a punishing trek across the slopes of Mount Hermon.

In Egypt, part of the response came from the technology unit. The equipment we had to take was now at least slightly smaller, if not by much. It also had a much longer battery life, and a more powerful and sophisticated transmission apparatus. A main focus was on encryption, with the aim of disguising the transmission

of intercept signals as simple line nois, using a technology known as hoping frequenciese. ~~In addition, we began regularly to alter frequencies to make the Egyptians' electronic detective work more difficult.~~

Still, it was clearly going to be a lot harder to operate in the heavily populated areas immediately~~deep~~ behind the Suez Canal without being seen or intercepted, now that the War of Attrition was over. Even before, we had always trained for the possibility of encountering resistance. Yet now we began to assume that this was, if not inevitable, at least likely. The line between being a pure military intelligence unit and a military force was being blurred by realities on the ground.

On Mount Hermon, the problem was not so much detection as survival. We already started going there during Yairi's term winter of 68' and ~~ran two~~ a major missions there during my first year, and, operationally, they were a success. They gave us somewhat lesser ~~nearly the same~~ real-time intelligence capability that we'd achieved in Egypt. But the physical demands were excruciating. Four years earlier, 68' On the first mission, we~~I~~ sent the most experienced team we~~I~~ had Giora Zorea team, Three days prior to the operation Giora wounded, the price of delay was huge so Uzi Yairi The

Unit Commander (I was his deputy then, after the University) called ,Avsha Horan who escorted them professionally along prepatation, and asked him whether ***he*** can lead it instead in such short notice.understanding whats at stake, Avsha answered positively. ~~-~~Amiram Levin was in the Hillutz~~'s~~. They very nearly didn't return. That was not their fault. It was mine. The operation~~plan~~ involved them setting off at night through the area around Mount Hermon, with the T-junction apparatus in a series of heavily laden backpacks. Laying low the following day, by the second night they ~~would then~~ ma~~dk~~e their way several miles up the some ~~main~~ road toward Damascus, install~~ed~~ the equipment, and started~~, if all went well,~~ get back onto the far slope of the mountain and climb the whole way to our fortified post on the Hermon. Our calculation was that if they reach a mile or two into the mountain, climbing some 6-8 hundred feet high , they could continue into the first hours of the morning ,completing the climb with very little chance of being discovered at this , wintry time. Thus, saving another day of hiding/ freezing without enough food. ~~by sunrise~~. We *knew* it would be taxing, so the team got a contingency means~~was primed~~ sort of~~with~~ "energy pills", proposed by our Doctor, to be used ,if the need arise, at

this mountain morning last leg. ~~when they set off~~. Yet we got the pills late, ~~stupidly~~, we'd run ~~almost~~ all the exercises without ever trying the contingency pill (a grave, unjustifiable mistake)~~the pills~~, and on terrain that, however challenging, could not fully simulate conditions on Mount Hermon. What happened was a surprise to us.[.EB CHECK with Avsha,Giora] The team felt quite exhausted before even reaching the mountain slope. And took the pills some two hours earlier. Weather was extremely cold. They started to climb. And once some 4-5 hours after taking the pills, the impact disappeared , replaced by extrema fatigue and loss of stamina.~~inevitable: the team's energy levels were fine at the outset, but once the effects of the pills tapered off~~, they crashed. It was a miracle/ great example of endurance and tenacity that they summoned the strength to keep going, install the apparatus, and, painfully exhausted, to make their way back into Israel.

On the second mission, in the winter of 197~~1~~2, I chose ~~Giora Zorea in tandem with~~ Bibi's team – (?)unmedicated. This time, it was the weather that almost defeated us. With snow and gathering storm clouds hovering over Hermon, the then-head of the northern command, Mordechai "Motta" Gur, who walked out side ,

just before dark,~~s~~ with me and Danny Yatom in the command post on top of Israeli Hermon,~~base~~, seemed to think we should cancel the mission. Motta had experience, and stature, as a combat commander.Palmachnik,and A vereran of the paratroops, he'd led a Brigade ~~battalion~~ in 1967 that reclaimed the Old City of Jerusalem from the Jordanians. He was being spoken as a future chief-of-staff. So he was hardly the kind of officer whose opinion I could easi~~hard~~ly ignore. Still when he turned to me and said, "are you *sure* this is a responsible thing to do," I replied: "It wont be easy, but we can do it."~~'s~~ ~~OK.~~" Despite the confidence I had in both Giroa and Bibi, the truth was that I, too, had my doubts. But I knew that if I showed even the slightest hesitation, either Motta or Bar-Lev himself would pull the plug. Given the lead-time required, and the other missions we were working on, that would mean a delay of almost a a year~~months~~ before we could try again. I did, of course, ask both Giora and Bibi whether *they* felt able to go ahead. As I knew they would, they shrugged off the question, insisting they would be fine.

For a while, they were. Though we'd dispensed with the pep pills, I ensured we had taken other precautions in case they got into difficulty~~–~~. We were extremely

worried of hypothermia. And the experts pointed to the need to take a soldier , before its too late on a special stretch protect him with isolated blankets and give him an infusion. The infusion tended to freeze

We developed a special battery operated heat coil around the basis of the infusion needle and calibrated it to warm the infusion fluid as it goes through. For the Backing Team we prepare a special tool to enable it to come back to the command post even from mile –and- a- half in a heavy snow storm. We called it Ariadne ropw (greek mythology). It was this element which made our day during the operation~~on the mountain~~. ~~In addition to their French-made Alpine jackets and boots, we'd sent them in with a spool of nylon filament, more than a mile-and-a-half long. The idea was for them to unroll it on their way over and use it – like the breadcrumbs in *Hansel and Gretel* – to find their way back in case there was a snowstorm. Our codename for it, in fact, was Ariadne, from the ancient Greek goddess of the labyrinth.~~

The operation started well. Good climb down, few events along the day, including a close call with a shepherd and his dog. The whole thing was extremely demending physically but when they completed installing the T-junction, after midnight it became clear that we

are heading into a snoe storm in several hours. It made no sense to stay freezing for another whole day and we decided to approve an attempt to climb directly, this few hours til the mountain, and then climb into the coming storm. But at least with no Syrian who would see the team. We had some experience accumulated in training regard snpw storm. And the officers were acquainted with the narrow climbing trail. They were already into the mountain when the storm struck.

The ~~But the~~ storm, when it came, was worse than any of us had reckoned on. It cut their visibility to four or five feet. We did have radio contact but, perhaps because of the weather, it was only sporadic. And though we knew they'd managed to haul in all the equipment, and install the T-junction, by late morning~~afternoon~~ on the second day we lost touch with them. With the snow and the fog getting worse.it was clear that they are somewhere within a mile or two from the command post, because rest of the trail was physically closed from both sides and they can hardly lose it. But when you are in the "open" in 3 feet visibility you can not navigate effectively. Thus, the risk of being lost, exhausted or freezing was real.~~,~~ I decided to send Danny in, with a separate team, to look for them.He locked the Ariadne rope to an anchor near us.

All the team connected in ropes one behind the other with our French made equipment from Chamonix, and they disappeared within seconds. It took two hours, quite tense, im on the communication. Motta looks at me, watching.At first ~~Yet by the next morning,~~ he'd had no luck finding them. He tried shouting, launching military fire works, even shooting from the weapons. And im getting the report, and ask Bibi whether he hears them. The answer is negative. Finally, despite the ~~obvious~~ danger if they were anywhere close, 9Which was minimized by the fact that he does not hear the shooting, I approved to him the use of handgranades,~~he had his men throw a~~ few hand grenades. That worked. Bibi heard something. Within a minute or so, Danny~~they~~ heard the answering boom of a couple of other grenades, from what seemed a few hundred feet away. When Danny finally located them, all of the men were alive. They were also utterly exhausted. Using the Ariadne rope they easily found their way back.

Once safely inside Israel, on the road back to Sirkin, Bibi must have finally nodded off. He was driving a (pick up) supply truck, with Giora beside him. Near Mount Tabor, in the Galillee, the vehicle veered off the

road and turned over. Amazingly, the two of them escaped with only a few scratches and bruises.

We did return to Hermon, and even deeper (?)into Syria, on T-junction operations, not without ~~any~~ further close calls.

In the south, we planted more sophisticated intercept~~s~~ on the Egyptians' main communication cables. The mission~~s~~ w~~er~~ase closely patterned on the one I'd led as deputy, only with bigger teams, thanks to newly acquired, titanium-blade helicopters capable of carrying heavier loads.

~~–~~The main operation happened in the winter of 72'~~There, too, we avoided major disasters, though there was one mission which came very close~~. Amiram led the team in, He was the most senior of my commanders and~~since~~ he had been involved from the start in planning my first mission when I was deputy. The first part that we ~~always~~ figured ~~w~~as ~~the most~~ delicate –was actually getting across the Gulf of Suez, through the steep wadis, and reaching the road area (along which the cable stretched)~~cable~~ undetected – again went without a hitch. After they had landed and unloaded, they split into two groups. Amiram's would go to work on the T-junction, while the other, Amitai Nachmani, four or five miles away~~, began wiring an~~

~~electricity post for a diversionary explosion~~. But as Amiram's lead team was making its way to the cable site,They had to prepare adelayed explosive device on a control shaft of the main Oil pipe Suez- Cairo in a small concrete hut, as a part of the diversion plan. they were spotted, by a~~n~~ ~~off-duty~~ guard who was inside the hut. He had a rifle. He was too close to ignore. Within seconds, there was an exchange of fire, and the Egyptian was killed. But even if no one else had heard the gunfire, they had to assume the man's body would be discovered within a day or two,and someone might know where he were to go. ~~if not overnight, certainly not long after they'd left.~~

I was in the command post, in Um-Hashiba. When Amiram radioed in, it was clear they couldn't simply go ahead and place the intercept as planned. It was too close to where they'd killed the Egyptian guard. But there was the problem of co-ordinating with the other group if we changed plans. I directed~~told~~ Amiram to head in their direction and put the T-junction on a stretch of cable 5~~a~~ mile~~s~~ or so further toward Cairo – figuring that the combination of the explosion, and the discovery of the Egyptian guard's body, would provide cover for the device. It did. They managed to get the intercept

installed, set the time-delayed explosion, and make the altered pick-up point for the helicopter. With just minutes to spare, minutes before sunrise.

Yet even as we were restoring, and expanding, our pre-1967 intelligence access, we were constantly planning – and pressing – for the expanded role I was determined to see for the sayeret. I suppose, I was in much the same position as Avraham during the unit's infancy. Then, we'd been training, planning, organizing ourselves for operations Avraham *hoped* we'd undertake – but at a time when Israel's military and political leadership showed no sign at all of letting us do them. I understood now how frustrated he must have felt when, each time he approached the general staff with a proposed mission, he was told no. Not now. Not yet.

Still, my position was easier. Not only had Sayeret Matkal already since proven itself, if only as an intelligence strike force. I was not alone in my conviction that, with the new challenges Israel was facing, we needed a specially trained, agile and capable *military* strike force. That's not to say that everyone accepted that Sayeret Matkal should take on the role. One top officer, in particular, was inalterably, and none too subtly, skeptical. Rafael "Raful" Eitan's (?)background, I

suppose, made this understandable. An (48’ Palmach) officer in Arik’s Unit 101, then commander of its successor battalion in the parachutists, he had now risen to become *katzhar* – the general staff officer in charge of all infantry and paratroop forces. Even when we’d been doing only intelligence missions across the canal, during the War of Attrition, Raful had not bothered hiding his view that we ought to have a *real* sayeret, the parachutists, handle them. Now, as I came forward with a series of detailed plans for military missions, he was one voice of opposition I knew I would always have to reckon with. Still, the voices that counted most belonged to Aharon Yariv and his deputy in military intelligence, Eli Zeira; the chief of staff, Bar-Lev; and a former chief-of-staff, now Defense Minister, Moshe Dayan. As I pressed our case with each of them, Raful complained to one of my officers that Sayeret Matkal’s direct line the the general staff, and through them to Dayan, gave us an unfair advantage. “Ehud’s not your commander,” he said. “He’s your foreign minister!”

The argument for being able to deploy some kind of expanded special-forces unit was becoming increasingly obvious. King Hussein’s army did finally (when/) manage to defeat the open insurgency of Fatah and the its more

militant rivals, the Democratic Front and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. That promised a quieter eastern frontier for us. But Arafat and the rest of the Palestinian leaders rebased across our northern border, in Lebanon. And when Jordan's Prime Minister, Wafsi al-Tal, was assassinated during a trip to Cairo in November 1971, we assumed,as well as ~~and~~ Mossad ~~soon confirmed~~, that we were seeing the start of a series of killings and terror attacks by a newly formed group within Fatah. It called itself Black September (wasn't it part of Arafath/), to mark the date in 1970 when the civil war in Jordan had begun.

And while there was at least some potentially encouraging news from Egypt – when Nasser's death from heart failure promoted the less flamboyantly militant Anwar Sadat to the presidency – several of our air force pilots was still being held captive both there, and in Syria.

~~My immediate~~I WAS naturally attracted to the Pilots challenge.A principle, we do not abandon our people at the battle field [EB, find a smoother phrase.EB]. Some acquaintances. And they were ***real fighters***, they deserved any effort. The same way they did not save themselves any risk while fighting in the skies for all of us. So, focus

was on the pilots. One of the ones held in Syria, Pini Nachmani, a lot of us not only knew. We'd worked with him. He had been in a helicopter squadron before joining a unit flying Phantom F4s, and had been part of several of our missions behind Egyptian lines. (should we (?) erase this)I was convinced there was a way that Sayeret Matkal could help get them free: by using our proven ability to get across borders undetected, and abducting Egyptian or Syrian officers to use as part of an exchange. In fact we've tried it, on the Egyptian front, under Digly, two years ago. Not successfully. But we have to try again. My plan to grab the Syrian officers took longer to get ripe). It was more ambitious, and complex. It required making Syrian- looking armoured cars- heliborne, to fly some unconventional path, and~~us~~ to train ~~all of~~ our ~~three~~ operational teams in a critical skill that we lacked: firing our Uzis in a ***selective*** manner. Hitting only those who were guards or trying to shoot back.~~not in the sands of the Sinai or the hills and groves of Syria or south Lebanon, but~~ indoors. At close quarters. In a crowd.

The target was a Syrian officers' club on the north-west~~north~~ern edge of Damascus. We would land in transport helicopters in a sparsely populated area a few miles away, unload three Egypt~~Syr~~ian armored cars captured in

19673~~73~~, and “turned” syrian [EB. Censorship will erase it.with Syrian army ID documents forged by Mossad]. We worked hard on it~~. We sent a couple of reconnaissance teams to check the layout and to verify what nights were the busiest~~. We trained in a mock-up (on Sirkin), focusing on how to fire, if we were forced to, without causing unnecessary casualties and lose control. We struggled, and experimented with the issue of neutralizing resistance by using tear gas, just to find that the result is panic that complicates rather than simplify the control challenge. [EB.I insisted(impractical with fighting missions. they will anyhow observed when you open fire .only Intelligence operations can be, if succeesful, remain unknown.EB) that one core element of the sayeret approach remained paramount, if and when we embarked on military missions: the emphasis on ensuring, if possible, that we could complete our operations without anyone knowing we’d been there).EB]

Once every month or so~~couple of weeks~~, I would update few seniors in the Intelligence and Operational branches~~Eli Zeira~~ ~~and other senior officers~~ at the *kirya* in Tel Aviv on our progress with the officers’ club plan. I would prod them for the in-principle approval for such an operation, not yet a go-ahead. But while the “no”

gradually got more equivocal, they were not ready, at least not yet, to give us even the tentative, potential green light.

It vividly reminded me the same painful process we had been into, less than two years ago under Digli, trying to ~~They did, finally~~, approve another operation: to try to capture air force officers in Egypt. At the time ‚69', we worked, informally, directly with officers inside the Research Department of the Intelligence, looking for opportunities for such operations. They noted that twice or thrice a week, pilots from a remote air force base in upper Egypt are allowed to take a ride of some 40 miles to a Nile city named Qina. They sometimes knew of it some 36 hrs in advance, but without being able to tell for sure if it will actually be/been executed later. and not in what hours? The fact that~~Since~~ our intended target was in a ~~fairly~~ remote area along the Nile,hundreds of miles south of Cairo, reduced the chance of what ~~I imagine they figured there was less that~~ could go wrong. But, ~~at least the first part of the Damascus plan, getting there, was straightforward~~it was really a long range mission. So, we moved the take off point to Sharm el Sheikh, at the southern tip of the Sinai desert, cutting the range by almost half. But, couldn't yet get even in-principle

green light because the need to move major telecommunications equipment,in cars and containers, would take more than 30 hours, which was a constrain created by the short early notice we could have. With the approval of DIGLI I APPROACHED THE SOUTHERN COMMAND CHIEF,Sharon.. I showed up in his Office in Beer Sheva, together with Shay Tamari, his head of Operations. I presented to him the plan. And the problem. He liked it. he smiled, and did not even try to hide ***his*** sense of déjà vu. He looked at me and said in his typical tone: “well, Ehud, as long as it is for operations, well, ***everything*** we have at the southern command is at your disposal. But remember, well, you know, ***only*** for operations”. He asked Shay to take care of it. It was perfect. Another major obstacle removed. It took further two months before we finally got the go-ahead green light.

~~Even for our long-haul helicopters, the same couldn’t be said of our mission in Egypt. We were targeting a desert airbase called Kina, not far from Luxor, several hundred miles south of Cairo. At a minimum, we couldn’t plan on setting off from anywhere near Sirkin. We decided to cut the distance almost in half by taking off from Sharm el-Sheikh, at the bottom of the Sinai~~. We plannedwould also be travelling lighter. two light jeeps

(?),some 15 soldiers altogether. At the core of the operation wWe would be a two-man team, acting as an Egyptian Military Police Checkpoint, with the proper uniform, weapons etc.: myself and a brash young soldieofficer named Marco Ashkenazi, who had grown up in the coastal city of Ashdod, south of Tel Aviv, but (whose father) was born in Cairo. Marco spoke fluent, Egyptian Arabic. We'd also be taking Egyptian MP-like motorcyle. And few barrels, made of brazened textile but with a "makeup" of a real barrel to be put abroadth the road.es, assuming I could get hold of them, rather than Syrian armored cars. The idea was for us to set up the a military-police checkpoint halfway along the road from the air base into town, and to stop, hopefully officers', vehicles as they returned around midnight.

That part almost put me out of commission even before we began. In sayeret tradition, we drilled every aspect of the mission, approximating as closely as possible the conditions under which we would be operating. Late one eveningafternoon, I sent one of our newer team commanders, a physcally imposing young officer named Alik Ron, on an errand with his driver to Palmachim air force base, not far from Tel Aviv, but yet with some five miles of relatively exclusive roadTel Aviv. Marco and I – dressed

in Israeli MP uniforms, on Israeli motorcycle and the same "barrels"~~s~~ ~~–~~ left with the rest of the team an hour earlier ~~few minutes later~~ and prepared to intercept them near Palmachim on their ~~way back to Sirkin~~. We were betting on the combination of rudimentary disguise – our uniforms, heavy MP helmets,and glasses ~~sunglasses~~ – buy basically tried to see how~~and~~ the element of surprise working even on members of our own unit. They did. A bit too well. We waved Alik's car to a halt. Then, exactly as we planned to do in Egypt, I opened the passenger door and ~~prepared to "arrest"~~ him,tried to grab him out. He ~~. When I grabbed him by the arm, he clearly didn't know who I was. And he~~ reacted just as I probably *should* have expected. Within five seconds ,***I*** *was* on the ground and ***Alik*** over me when the rest of us Nahman Rivkind, Danny Yatom and others overcoming Alik and release me.~~'d expect any well-trained Sayeret Matkal officer to do. He shoved me away as he got out of the car, giving him room to maneuver. He slammed a fist into my stomach, forcing me backward. Before I knew what had happened, he was sitting on top of me, pinning my arm behind my back – as both my fellow "MP" and Alik's driver wrestled him off of me.~~ By the time we got close to actually doing the operation, I

was at least prepared for the potential perils of roadblock duty.

We took off immediately when it got dark.~~a bit after nine at night.~~ We were in place well before midnight. The road near the Egyptian air base was almost empty but gradually, just as we'd anticipated, cars began heading back from town toward the base. Operationally, things went better than I could have hoped. Clearly, military checkpoints were not unusually common here. The only words I had to say were " Hat el Wara'at!" Which means "Your Papers, Please!" (without the 'please'. In Egypt at the time, MPs were not using this P word), afterwards I had to grab him out, by force if necessary, or at the point of my gun. ~~a lot less common here than on the road from Tel Aviv to Sirkin.~~ What talking was needed, besides it ~~the occasional grunted "stop"~~ in Arabic, I left to Marco. Some vehicles, if they were too beaten up to be likely to be carrying officers, we merely let pass. But we waved aside a dozen in all. With barely a question, no complaints, and certainly none of Alik's instinct to resist, we detained a~~several~~ dozen people. We confiscated one pistol. The problem was that none of them was a pilot, not even officer or soldier. ~~ranking officer. None of them was even a pilot.~~ There were a couple of suspected

persons~~very junior officers~~ , and we did take them back with us for interrogation. But they were clearly of nowhere near sufficient stature to secure the release of our prisoners. They've been released two weeks later. Certain deterrence impact, stemming from our capacity to operate there , probably stayed hanging in the air, but in terms of the "results test", which I started to think of as the only ***real*** one, it was a failure. I was at the center of it on any conceivable level. On the long flight back I was frustrated. Committed myself to learn the lessons from the failure. But never give up on the essence of it. A way should be found to release our pilots.

Now , as The Unit commander, I saw ~~That left me more was convinced than ever that~~ the best chance was in Syria. Particularly with reports that our pilots there had been tortured, Aharon Yariv and Eli Zeira, did not always like my tendency to search for 'fighting opportunities'. For them, in a way, it was a distraction from the main task of The Unit which was Intelligence ops. I'd got indirect support from Arnan, now in The Office of counter terror Activities, at the Prime minister's office. He supported it full heartedly and shared his trust in us with anyone he met. IN fact, he himself started to devise ,with small circle of proffesionals from differenet services, a plan

to reach into El Ma'adi military prison outside Cairo, and release our pilots there. At certain point in 73' he even asked to get Yoni Netanyahu into ***his*** **team. The effort stopped at the 73' war after which the pilots and few others were released together with 73**' IDF prisoners. ~~too, were leaning toward letting us attempt the mission~~.

More~~over importantly,~~ there were signs that under a new chief-of-staff – Avraham's old Palmach and armored corps friend, David Elazar, aka Dado – there would be a greater receptiveness to expanding the sayeret's role.

Still, it was not the Syrian operation that marked the definitive turning point. In fact, that plan never got used, at least not as intended. The real start of Sayeret Matkal's development as a broader special-forces unit came only 8~~a~~ miles or so from our base (Sirkin), on a runway at Lod Airport. And the first sign I got of it was a telephone call, a little before seven in the evening, on Monday, May 8, 1972.

* * *

I was at home. Nava and I had just fed Michal, who was almost two, full of energy, and showed no sign of wanting to go to bed. "It's Manno," said the voice on the

line, unnecessarily, since I recognized it. I had got to know Brigadier General Emanuel Shaked, Dado's chief of operations, years earlier, when he was his head of operations in Northern command ~~since becoming head of the sayeret~~. "A plane has been hijacked," he said. "It's heading for Lod. They will land in about 40 min. They've got hostages. Get to the airport. Dado and Dayan are on their way. They'll be in the room below the control tower."

I left as soon as I'd phoned ~~Yoni~~Danny, My deputy and arranged for him to get ~~his brother's team, and Uzi Dayan's~~whoever is in the unit to Lod. Usually on week days there were very few of them in the base. Most were training elsewhere. ~~Amiram Levin's was in the Negev, not close enough. "Get Danny, too," I told Yoni. Though Danny Yatom was not longer my deputy, and was about to move to the armored corps, I knew I'd need all of my most experienced officers if we were going to help deal with whatever happened once the plane landed.~~

It was on the ground by the time I'd reached the airport. I found not only Dayan and Dado at the base of the control tower. There was a who's who of Israel's military brass: Talik, who'd become chief of the operations branch of the army; Rechavam Ze'evi, head of

the central command, which included Tel Aviv and Lod; Raful came later, too, in his role as head of the infantry and paratroops. And, ~~–~~of course ~~the one I knew best,~~ Aharon Yariv, head of military intelligence. The plane was a Boeing 707, operated by the Belgian airline Sabena. It had been flying from Brussels to Tel Aviv when it was taken over, shortly after takeoff from a stopover in Vienna. All that we knew at this point was that the hijackers were Arab, almost certainly Palestinian, and that there were almost one hundred~~90~~ passengers aboard.

But when the captain, an English RAF veteran named Reginald Levy, taxied, as ordered to a remote side runway and made radio contact with the tower, we learned more. The hijackers were indeed Palestinians: later, it would turn out that they were members of Black September. They were demanding that 317 comrades be released from Israeli jails and flown to Cairo.

Dado did not even share all the details with me. There was an urgent mission to be accomplished. To paralyze the airplane from being able to leave, should the Terrorists got a second thought and order the Captain to take off. There was already in the room an engineer from El Al, I believe, who already explained to them what

should be done. Ive asked him to repeat he basically said’ bring me under the plane and I will use a tool I have with me to take out a pin which holds the nose wheel stable in a direction. I had no reason to question it. I told Dado that I’ve ordered The Unit to Lod AP. But they might accumulate gradually. He nodded. I then took Shay Agmon, the only officer who were in the uit at this time.he brought with him three soldiers. So we were four of The Unit

~~Before Dado could even ask, I told him: “We’ll be ready.” Before he, or any of the others, could start debating how Sayeret Matkal could help, I headed off to assemble my officers and fighters, as they arrived over the next couple of hours, into an effective anti-hijack force. There were only a handful by the time I next heard from Manno. He said the first imperative was to keep the hijackers from forcing the pilot to take off again. I went off to meet with Dado, Dayan and an El Al engineer on how best to disable the Sabena jet. Then I took the first of our officers to arrive, a guy named Shai Agmon,~~ and we set off with the El Al engineer toward the plane. Shai was a very good officer whom I liked a lot. ~~who I’d have wanted with me anyway.~~ The son of a Palmach intelligence chief from 1948, he ~~probably~~ had ~~the~~

livelyiest, most imaginative mind–, curiosity and high operational skillsin the unit, which was saying something. We took an indirect route to the plane, behind a couple of hangars bending around the whole airport perimeter, behind a couple of hangars and approaching it from behind. It was the furthest most isolated corner of the Airport The engines were still on. The noise was deafening as we crept, crouching low, behind the tail, underneath the hull and toward the nose wheel. It was a srange feeling. The crew and the terrorists are fouror five yarde over your head. It’s clear they can neither see us no find out that we are so close. But we can seemingly do nothing right now . we need more fiighters and a plan which will catch them by surprise. Night was always our best friend. Waiting for the engineer to complete his job, which took him some five minutes but looked to me twice long, I started to calculate whether we can, assuming The Unit will show up early enough, to do some preperations, and training and do it tonight. And how exactly to do it. The reason we were called that evening, to Lod by Manno was quite incidental yet far reaching in consequence. About a year earlier ,while planning readiness contingencies arrangments for a variety of instalations which couls find itself a subject to hostile

or terror activities the Operation Branch produced a long list if instalations with names of units attached to them as the first, then secnd ptiority for call up if need arises. It was based more than anything else on the physical vicinity of the units to the site/installation. Thus, because we were the closest our name appeared near Lod Air Port. The second closest one was Sayeret TZanhanim.it was really good Manno found me immediately on first call. It also closed a circle on another old debate when our base was chosen 25 minutes drive from center of Tel Aviv, many criticized for year this choice of Avraham. Including us as young officers. We truly believed that high standard, spartanic,ready to fight unit should deploy in some remote remote deserted British Mandate Police Station in the North Mountains , or somewhere in the Jerusalem mountains. Many talked behind Avraham’s back that we were stuck here because of his bohemian, party seeking personality. After sunset, more interested in a good restaurant or women in Tel Aviv than in watching his soldiers training somewhere. Avraham argued thet we’re all childish in this regard and cannot grasp the criticality for such a (yet) fragile Unit to be close to the HQ and the Kiria where all rel vant decision regards its future are taken. But here, with this

unrolling event the final “proof” emerged that he was right, after all. Regarding the long term as well.

The engineer reported he completed the job. I asked him twice , shouting into his ear, whether he is sure it’s done. Yes,for sure. he answered. We crouched back to the tail and left the area making sure we are exactly behind it. I seized the opportunity to assess how to reapproach the place and where exactly we have to deploy if I will come later tonight with some 20-25 soldiers, to wait for an opportunity to storm it.~~to the rear wheels. The technician started by neutralizing one of the plane’s gear systems.~~ But when we got back to the control tower, the engineer described what we’ve done to the nose wheel but others in the ~~airline’s~~ technical team who joined while we were on mission, argued~~had decided~~ that wasn’t enough. The jet could still take off. So we went back, twice(?): first to drain hydraulic fluid, and finally to partially deflate a couple of the tires.After the second time , I discussed with Shay our impressions and reached a conclusion that as we come once and again we never see/know what happens on the airplane. We chose a place in a dry low vegetation field along the right side of the airplane for an observation and snipers position some 70 yards from the plane . for the night time it was relevant

and later on Shay himself took command of this observation/snipers team.On our last visit the engines did not work anymore but a relatively silent generator connected to the airplane. It was much more tense approach because on one hand they could hear us if there were any noisy mishap, moreover, once we partially inflated the tires, or probably even beforehand, as we drained out the hydraulic oil, the cabin could have noticed. It somehow ended quiet.

By the time we finished, several dozen members of the unit had arrived. I got El Al to give us a hangar where one of its 707s, identical to the Sabena plane, had been parked.I went with Shay, Brunner and Danny to see the 707 in the hangar . Two EL AL or probably IAI technicians were with us, as well as some of our own soldiers. We learned as fast as we could. First the cokpit and end entrances, through which passengers usually board are too high to reach without high ladders. The wings are low enough in the rear of each wing for a tall/ strong guy to climb on with his personal gear. And even short ones can do if raised / kicked up by other two standing on ground. On the wings there are two emergency exit doors that falls inward if you hit them hard on certain ssigned area on their upper edge. And that those might be blocked from

within by a seat (if the airline company wants maximum passengers), but normally not ***all*** *of them are* **blocked**. I climbed the wings twice. Once alone ,and once (much easier) thrown up by Danny and Shay. Openned the two exit doors on tats wing with an open fist hit on the upper sign on the door. I've noticed, looking at the rubber Pakungs/fillaments that we are dealing with "virgin" doors which had not been opened for long time. Not something hectically prepared for our "visit". I enetered the cabn with the officers and tried to imagine fighting there when its full with passengers and several shooting terrorists. I've discussed it for few moments with Danny, Shay and Brunner. All of us shared the feeling that climbing could be reasonable, either slowly before we get exposed or fast and furious, the moment we did. The opening of the doors was simple but carried a risk of falling on a chair inside in a way that will leave it only a firing position into the cabin and not a charging entrance. But at least one should normally kept free from a seat. And we can charge through those doors which will fall inwards. A disturbing feeling was raised by Brunner , and we all agreed, that entering through the emergency exit, narrow and low door with our AK 47/54s and the related gear, is both heavy, clumsy and limits us whether

for charging into the cabin or using flexibly the firing positions created by the blocked fallen doors. We also realized that the automatic mode of shooting in our AK 47/54 (or even Uzis for this matter) is irrelevant in this case. It will kill or wound too many. We anyhow should use single shot mode. For me , under the circumstances it was sufficient. I decided to go back to the control tower. I've directed Danny, my deputy to keep accumulating force, to arrange for their training of this technicalities that we've just been through and shape quickly simple sops/rules for team work on climbing, shooting from entrance, opening the door,charging through a door, moving while shooting along the aisle (somewhat like in a narrow trench). I also directed Dannny to bring from our base or elsewhere some 30 Berreta .22 pistols. I knew ,as Danny did, that we are not actually trained and used to this , really small, weapon. Some of us trained with FN 9 mm pistol, which is bigger and heavier, yet a pistol, for the Syrian Officer's Club mission. But that was long ago. I've heavily used FN 9MM in the commando course in Mon Luis. But this was even much longer time ago. But,: the air marshals, who had been by now deployed on board of any Israeli flight, as a consequence in response to our assessment of the El Al hijacking to

Algiers four years earlier, they did use the Berreta .22.. Almost all of the air marshals were former soldiers. Many were reservists from the sayeret. So, we also decided to start collect air marshals from incoming El Al flights, who were our reservists and had a feeling of The Unit. I left the hangar heading to the tower control. The whole aspects and action items were discussed, framed and agreed upon within some ten minutes, shorter than the time it took me now to type it into my AirMac , while all four of us standing on the 707s wing in the hangar. I felt good. My old wish to see The Unit acting efficiently under tight time pressure to prepare a fighting operation and extract from (uncontrolled) circumstances ,the best we could, seemed to start working. We ~~I~~ had no formal orders at this point. The people who would give them – Dado and Dayan and, through him, the Prime Minister, Golda – were gathering every bit of information they could about the hijackers and their intentions, and trying to decide how to respond. Dado told me “talk to Talik and see what can you do in order to take it over if that’s the decision. It was around 2130. I felt uneasy about something and asked my driver to go back to the Hangar and bring Shay Agmon with him. I sat down in the corner with Talik. He was an

admired commander of our Armored Forces, but the last time he fought as Infantry was WW II

Or 48’ war. Unlike the Palmachniks, he was not acquainted with the details of guerilla, special ops and the like. He asked me what should we do? I told him, that I’ve seen the place several times now, and just visited the hangar and the 707. I need some two hours to acquaint my people with the climbing on the wings and opening from the outside the four emergency exits and operating from or through the doors, than about an hour for team and all force briefings and personal preparations of the participants. So, about 0030 we will be ready to deploy and from around 0100 we will be ready to act. He agreed. He raised a question. If this plan will be accepted, once you deploy, what and how it will be activated ? I told him, ‘I will wait for either an order from the Tower to act or a sudden actual shooting occurs in the cabin and I will immediately storm the plane and report results. We went to see Dado at the center of the room Dayan nodded to me with his head and left with his entourage to a neighboring room. Dado listened. Seemed understanding and positive, especially when he heard the timeline. I repeated with him the emphasize on the need to know as early as we can, whether the space behind the emergency

doors is open or not? And of course how many they are, (we assumed no more than six), weapon etc. Dado updated me briefly, he mentioned a British captain who is jewish, but probably the terrorists don’t know it, and that a communication with the terrorists was set, they demand the 315 prisoners to be released and flown to Cairo, and added they seem to be quite nervous. I took with me a communication kit to be able to be in contact with Talik, to get the decisions and orders. Shay Agmon came. I directed him to take with him four of his soldiers, with the proper equipment and set the snipers/observation point we’ve discussed, some seventy meters from the airplane on the right side. I ordered him to report to Danny before he leaves him and to report to me when he leaves Danny and when he reaches the final position. And then, within an hour from now, to start to report to me continuously of what he sees. He is not supposed to shoot unless shooting opened in the cabin and he is convinced that he sees and recognizes an armed terrorist. I gave him my communication kit and the extra batteries and told him we might come there with some 30 soldiers, and deploy some 70 yards behind the airplane in about 3 hours . around 0100. Talik approached me again. Ive asked for another communication set and updated him that within an

hour I will have an observation/Snipers post to report and ,if worse come to worst, even respond before we come with the full force. I promised to come once again before we leave to the plane. I went back to the Hangar to oversee the preparations. It went slow and by now we had some 35 officers and soldiers, Uzi Dayan team as well. I've seen we're going to miss the timeline. Wi took all those who already passed through most of stations or could complete it within 30 min and made them a force of four half teams, six people each including an officer, each for a door on the wings. And left behind a training team to complete elementary preparation of those who remained and those who will come later. I briefed the half-team commanders, they briefed and finalize last details with their own prople. But I had sometime to think it all over. There was no decision yet. But, knowing the people in the room, I thought yielding to the terrorist demands is no starter at this stage. ~~I assumed one of the options -~~ The most likely, if not the inevitable, option – would be a surprise attack on the plane, with the aim of killing or disabling the hijackers and freeing the hostages. I preffered a night attack. The chance of a real surprise seemed to me to be higher. And we all were night animals , used to it and liked it. Normal people,

terrorists included, are less alert/ effective at night. And who knows what could develop once comes day light.

Israel had never mounted such an operation. But if it was going to succeed, it was going to be executed now, or within the coming 3-18 hours. Not following two weeks of preparation down the stream. He who needs two weeks to prepare , coerces his government into yielding to terror out of no choice. A tough dilemma. And if such an operation has to succeed it require stealth, agility, pinpoint execution, discipline, the ability to react with both quickness and calm to whatever happened once the attack began. I strongly felt that we are the right choice. That we will be ready ,in an hour or two, better than anyone else could be at such tight timeline. It can be no guaranty for a full success , but it stands highly probably.~~knew that only Sayeret Matkal had the remotest chance of pulling it off, and~~ I thought ~~was confident~~ that Dado and Dayan saw it the same way. Not exactly, it turned out. ~~knew this too~~.

Toward midnight we were still behind time some 30 minutes. Flights for the night stopped. We have no air marshals yet. Probably morning flights will bring few. I was worried of losing trust and time by missing the timeline

I've set. The reports from Shay were that the cabin door near the cockpit is opened and from time to time he probably sees one of the terrorists crossing. There was dimmed light in the cabin, probably based on the generator. I decide to skip my proposed last visit to the control tower. Nothing had changed ,that I knew of. I had a communication kit with Talik, and with Shay. So, ive just announced that I'm leaving, and some 30 minutes later reported that I'm behind the airplane, ready for action. We were ling on the ground some seventy yards behind the airplane's tail ,two columns, 12 people each, plus myself and a communication soldier. We already adopted from our base four short ladders about two and half yards high which could improve the rate of climbing onto the wing.

~~What they didn't know is that we weren't starting completely from scratch. With hijackings obviously becoming one of the Palestinians' new weapons of choice, I'd tried – and failed – to get El Al to let us use one of their 707s at Lod for anti-hijack training. Not unreasonably, they feared that if word got out that we were staging simulated assaults in the dead of night, it wouldn't be great for business. So we sneaked through the airport fence a number of times and used a couple of old~~

707s, which belonged to the air force, to familiarize ourselves with the basics of the aircraft.

Still, the difficulties we faced in actually getting onto the Sabena plane, held by armed terrorists with nearly 100 frightened passengers, were obvious. And the time for any detailed preparation was likely to be short. One of my main worries was weaponry. In a small space like the interior of a 707, it would be a risk to use our Uzis. I decided to equip most of the unit with pistols instead, 9mm army Berettas, even though we'd had almost no experience with them. For the assault team, I chose as many as I could from the squad I'd been preparing for the attack on the Syrian officers' club. They, at least, had been trained on how to operate in a crowded room without accidentally wounding – or worse, killing – people who weren't involved.

Most of the several hours that we now had, I used to practice the assault as best we could. From our experiments on the Air Force 707s at Lod, I had some idea about the best way to get into the plane, and now confirmed my assumption with El Al. Hitting the curved aircraft doors, hard, with a crowbar at the top would, with any luck, force them open. My plan was to use four teams: covering the two small doors above each wing, the

~~rear door, and the front entrance, nearest the cockpit. I got four small, mobile ladder units from El Al, the kind used to service airplanes. It was critical, I stressed to each team, that the assault come from all sides simultaneously. The greater the element surprise, the greater the confusion and hesitation we could cause, the better our chances of ending things quickly and safely.~~

~~Around four in the morning of May 9, with Dado's tentative OK, we began to "pre-deploy". We again approached the aircraft from behind. I was in front, with two lines of 12 fighters behind me, a couple of hundred feet behind the jet. Even though we were far enough back to avoid any real risk of being heard, the El Al teams had pushed, rather than driven, the mobile ladder vehicles alongisde us.~~ "The first five~~half~~-second~~s~~ is what will matter most," I'd told the force~~squad~~ in our final briefing in front of the hangar~~in the hangar~~. " Act decisively, as if all others are doing the same ,which they do.Trust your instincts. You're trained for this."

My instincts told me that if we didn't move quickly, we might miss the opportunity. For waiting for an ideal moment which might not come. I was already an hour on the ground it's 0215, and dawn start fainting about 0445. Time slips fast. I've tried to urge Talik, once and again to

give us a ‘green light’ to choose the right moment, and act. He needed nore time, he said. And then, some what cautiously, he raised the idea that Raful, the Katzhar at the time, who joined the team at the Control Tower about an hour earlier, will join us with a small team, probably in a place which will enable him to see everything better than I could,on the left side of the air plane. I was disturbed. That’s not a clever step. Raful was not present at our training or briefings, doesn’t know how we might deal with obstacles and surprises, and might even, while approaching the area, be noticed. I told Talik it can not work at this stage. He did not contradict me or gave an unequivocal order , but said he is sending Raful to the Area. I answered;’ I can not tell you what to do. But I will get order from one source. Not two. And as long as you do not explicitly change it, it is you. I’ve got it in front of you from Dado’. Talik, did not respond, just said ‘we will talk later’.~~it would soon be light. That would almost certainly mean losing any element of surprise. But one of the other things we trained for was to wait.~~ It was about hour before~~45 minutes or so before~~ sunrise when Talik called again and said’ in few minutes the Big Boss will come to see you, with Aryeh’, he added. That made clear whom he meant. Arieh Brown was the

Military aide to Moshe Dayan and followed him like a shaddow. I left my place at the front and went to the end of the columns, Few minutes later I've noticed two figures gradually approaching from the dark behind us.

Dayan greeted me whispering, and remained standing silent for few moments, looking at the two columns of lying soldiers, then at the shadow of the airplane and back on the soldiers, as if trying to assess to himself whether that is a possible mission or an impossible one. He was at the time a genuine authority on military and operational issues. With deep experience and highly respected judgement. ~~I heard footsteps behind me. Turning, I saw Dayan. In a way, his arrival reminded me of my very first operation in the sayeret. When, before heading north onto the Golan, I'd been summoned to brief the then-chief-of-staff, Tzvi Tzur. I'd got the sense that Tzur was less interested in vetting the details of my planned approach than to confirm that *I* was confident it would work. Dayan, of course, had interest, knowledge, experience, and a long record of distinction on the operational side. Yet even so, it was clear to me that he, too, wanted to see that I, as commander, honestly felt we were in a position to do what was needed. Especially, though he never so much as hinted at this,~~

~~because one of the officers I was taking with me, Uzi, was his nephew.~~

"How do you plan to do it?" he asked in a low~~ask~~ quiet voice~~ed~~. ~~By now, at least, the engines had been switched off. We could hear each other.~~ I explained the plan. How we were going to enter simultaneously in four teams. And storm from whatever door will be open. I said '~~I thought~~ W~~w~~e can ~~would~~ do it. ~~succeed,~~Better now than in day time ~~especially~~ since darkness gave us an element of surprise, and because the terrorists were bound to be tiring by now". Dayan listened focused, but did not respond. He kept standing for another few moments ,looking around, thinking. He surely knew, but did not mention or ask about his nephew Uzi, the son of his fallen brother, who was one of the officers lying in front of him. I did not mention it either. ~~Dayan merely nodded.~~ "I'll let you know," he said suddenly, shook my hand and returned, followed by Arieh, who did not say a word, to the control tower.

Fifteen minutes later, he did send word: "No," the message said. "Not tonight".

I was deeply frustrated/ disappointed. First in a row of future such experiences. I briefly thought of Avraham,

and earlier, Sharon. That's what waits for all who try to push through the "envelope" of accepted perceptions of boundaries. I felt we could, in fact should have already ***done*** it. And even thought my mistake was that I gave up showing up once again in the room under the Control Tower to verify that ***all*** relevant players, including Dayan will more formally approve the plan before I left with my raid teams.

But, I was still in charge of making sure that we will not be seized , pants down, at any moment, whatever developments occur. So, before leaving for the Control Tower I"ve ordered Shay to change position to a further, better comouflaged position facing the left [EB. To correct where Shay described earlier at the ***right*** side.EB] side of the airplane and to stay as a ground anchor for information on the ground. I order a fffour smaller teams force of 16 soldiers and two officers to stay behind the airplane, but now some 200 yards behind, hidden better from the possibility that terrorists will come down to look or search around ,or assess the damage they realized, to the landing gear. It was a contingency force for an emergency, which might occur in the cabin without us having any hint in advance, and lead to a massacre or

exploding the airplane together with passengers and crew but ***without*** **the terrorists**

[EB. probably too early to mention it.. The suicide option, and I'll come to it late , was not perceived, based on the record of the time, as highly probable .EB]

I went back to the Control tower room. I didn't hide my frustration as well as the urgency of shaping an alternative. To wait for next night could be a long shot gamble. Dado and Gen. Ze'evi aka Gandhi, set down with me. There were some good/bad news. The terrorists were convinced to allow the Captain to go negotiate? Talk to our side. They ***did not*** *know* who is sitting on our side and ***did not know***, at that stage that he is Jewish.They expected him ,based on his responsibility for his passengers to convince the Israeli side that they're sincere, the risk is immense and we better accept their terms and avoid a tragedy. The Captain really tried to convince Dayan to consider it. He brought with him a piece of light yellow material that was found immediately to be what he argued it is, high explosives. He talked about four terrorists, two men with pistols and two woman with detonation high explosive devices and probably hand grenades. He stated he has that there are about 95 passengers and some 7 in crew. When ***my*** question was asked

he answered that none of the emergency exits is blocked by a seat. But at this stage as Ghandi mentioned he raised his eyebrow, seemingly suspecting, even realizing that our minds are on a rescue raid. Before he left this was even clearer to him. He was deeply disturbed. Dayan did not tell him explicitly what might happen next. Captain Levy, however , after telling Dayan that his wife is also among the passengers, urged him to promise him that Israel will take care of his youngest daughter, if the Levy's could not support her anymore once this endeavor is over.

It was around 0930 in the May 9 morning, The Captain was by now back in the airplane. A Red Cross official, that the Terrorist demanded to talk with from the first hour has now reached the Airport. He was a low level official with a little gravitas. The question was still hovering in the air. What next? No way to launch a night-like strike in day light. It will be exposed long before battle contact and end in disaster. But how to surprise in a way that will deprive a terrorist from the opportunity to shoot at dozens of passengers or explode the airplane?. Gandhi was the first to come with an idea. It stemmed from another responsibility of him. As the time was dragging, the terrorist"s leader, his Nom the Guerre

being Captain Rifa’at, sounds over the radio more and more edgy on the issue of bringing *his* prisoners, some 315 of them, from all over our prisons to Lod airport and prepare the 2nd plane to take them to Cairo.

Our negotiating team, led by Victor Cohen, a legendary Shabak’s person. The best agents operator and prisoners interrogator of his time, directed personally in real time, by Dayan who also knew both Arabs and human weaknesses first hand. Our team tried to gain time and to appear cooperating with the Terrorists demands and needs.

So, Ghandi, under Dayans directive was busy from early morning in staging a big show, where few hundreds of soldiers, young and reservists, will be dressed in our prison System khaki uniforms and will be brought around noon time in busses to Lod Airport secured by dozens of Israeli Military Police in their helmets and colourful gadgets, and will be disembarked from the busses at a point by the secondary runway, so that the terrorists from the hijacked airplane (as well as the Red Cross official from the Tower) could see them from some quarter of a mile. Close enough to watch many details but far enough to avoid them see its all fake. Next stage should be dragging ***another*** 707 into place and stage a process of preparing them to be loaded for the flight to Cairo.

It was while overseeing this complicate ‘Show biz” piece, or probably when Ghandi asked himself, and what’s then?,Ghandi, like Dado was a Palmachnik, focused as a 2nd nature on finding concrete, however unconventional solutions. So again, what’s then, after we’ve loaded the “prisoners” on the other707? Should we send a team of mechanics to pretend preparing the hijacked airplane for take off? Come on, We can’t afford really prepare it for a real take off?. So?. It was probably here that the idea struck him, which he shared with Dado and myself.

“With such an effort to deceive them why can’t we add another layer to it. Why can’t Ehud’s people take the role of the airport mechanics, well disguised, and storm the airplane while “preparing” it for flight. The idea was brilliant and immediately adopted by us. Dado went to update dayan, knowing him we knew he would love it as well. I’ve stayed with Ghandi and Yona Ephrat, his deputy to work out the details, Ghandi and Yonah will take care of anything outside the ‘operational zone’ in a radius of 300 yards around the airplane, including everything, from the “show Biz” with the prisoners to the arrangements with El AL to prepare for us the little buggy-like trains and towed high Ladders to reach ***all*** entrances. To another 707 for training. As well as the herd of medical teams and

border guards teams to join us within two minutes of the start of shooting by just driving on the main runway Last night one took off. Yonah even ordered the bringing of dozens of thick mattresses to be deployed underneath the higher entrances and under the wings to enable passengers to jump out in case of a fire or disorganized evacuation which might develop. I will concentrate on training the teams and set its final construct. It was around 1100 when I left to my People at the Hangar. It was clear time is of essence. Under Ghandi's idea day light was essential. We had just few hours to adapt whatever we already gathered in the last 16 hours, on and around the hijacked airplane and in the Hangar, into totally different modus operandi/paradigm with many more elements which had never been tried out operationally by us , by anyone else in Israel, or in fact anywhere else.

I understood the challenge, but by now felt we *can* make it happen. It needed everything I've tried to instill, on the shoulders of my predecessors, into The Unit spirit and norms. To work swiftly, calmly and effectively ,unmoved by emotions ,feelings, wandering thoughts or all the noises around. Ruthlessly focused on what can actually happen during the operation itself and exercise the answers to it, as much as time allows. Be cruel on separating the

essential from everything else and focus exclusively on ***it***. Focus. Focus. Focus. Every minute counts. The time constraint is a ***given***. Our role is to avoid dictating to our Nation a painful damaging capitulation to terror, by our inability to focus and act under the pressures of deadlines, fears of failure and operational uncertainties. In the Hangar I found Danny, putting order into the chaotic activities. I started to build the final teams for the operation. There were now more entrances we will have to deal with. That's better. It makes surprise more effective and the raid more simultaneous and redundant in case problems faced in eeither of them. There was Danny, he just told me that the El Al tecnicians assisting us in the Hangar, showed him how to climb from the nose wheel at ground level, directly into the cockpit, and that Uri Koren a size A/big body soldier (from Jerusalem , whom I first met years earlier when he was 16, in Hug Sayarim of Beit Nehemia) tried it and he can do it. And even get into the cockpit if the net-like metal cover is open. Time was so short that I immediately ordered Danny and Itzik Gonen, (an officer) and Uri Koren to be the nose/ cockpit entrance team. There was Uzi Dayan, extremely courageous physically and independent, flexible creative mind, I ordered him together with Galili and Hezi to the Tail

entrance. Both nose and tail entrances were on the ***left*** side where I naturally intended to position myself to get the best possible view and real time control of what happens. Both were very high entrances which demanded some 7 yards tall ladders dragged on a 4 wheel structures. Now there were the four emergency exit doors, two on each of the two wings, which I intended to follow closely during the operation, being the crucial, central and easier to get through, now that we knew there are no seats behind them. By the time I came to the Hangar Bibi was already there with his team. Training on the different techniques. They came from some field training. He was very good officer, assertive and action oriented. (EB. TO check.He had another edge, he participated in the Syrian Officers Club Training,as well as Uzi and Danny Brunner). I ordered Bibi to the leading other door on the ***other*** **side**, **the** *right* **side of the airplane**, together with Arik gerstel that he chose out of his soldiers. Another two of his soldiers were assumed to take the other ***right*** door.

Earlier that May 9th morning, flights were resumed to Lod Air Port and gradually we started to collect air marshalls we knew. ~~We have another idea."~~

~~Whatever the "other idea" was, I still felt that in the end we would have the rush the plane. I reassembled~~

~~the unit in the hangar. “We keep training,” I said. I was actually relieved to have the extra time. Broadly, I was satisfied with the plan. In sayeret tradition, although I’d come up with it, we’d batted back and forth the potential problems, refining and improving it. The key elements – surprise, the simultaneous assault from four sides – were obvious. Still, I did worry about the lack of our experience in using the Berettas – combined with the inescapable fact that we’d never specifically trained for operating inside an airplane. I can’t remember when the idea came to me, or how, but I did, in the hours that followed, find a way of easing that problem. While no one currently in the unit had ever trained inside a 707, there was a group that had: the air marshals who had been deployed in response to our assessment of the El Al hijacking to Algiers four years earlier. Almost all of the air marshals were former soldiers. Many were reservists from the sayeret. As El Al flights continued to fly into Lod on May 9, I sent word to bring any of the marshals with Sayeret Matkal experience to our hangar.~~

By noon timemid-afternoon,, we had a ~~half-dozen~~three ~~of them~~. One, in particular, Mordechai Rachamim_,~~was~~ importantreinforced my confidence.

I remembered Mordechai well from– The Unit~~the sayeret~~. He was a Yemeni Jew, from a moshav Eyakhin, the same one Baddura and the Yemenite workers came from. I never asked him if any of his family members tried to settle in Waddi Hawarrit whe he was a 1 year old baby~~ near Mishmar Hasharon~~, tall and strong and athletic. A natural move–on fighter. He was no ordinary air marshal. Early in 1969, he'd been posted on an El Al flight from Amsterdam to Tel Aviv. On a stopover in Klotten AP,Zurich, four PFLP gunmen had leapt out of a car near one of the hangars, opening fire with AK-47 assault rifles and throwing grenades at the plane. The assault damaged the jet, and injured four of the crew(?), one of whom, the co-pilot, died(?) afterward. Mordechai, armed with a Beretta, rushed to the cockpit window and returned fire. Seeing that the attackers were too far away, he slid down the rear emergency shoot and, once on the tarmac, opened fire again, killing the head of the~~one of the~~ attackers and keeping the rest of them at bay until the Swiss security forces arrived and arrested them. Mordechai was arrested too, but was eventually acquitted of any charges and sent home.

Each time another air marshal arrived, I slotted him into one of the assault teams, and stood one of our

active sayeret soldiers down. None of them protested, but I could see the frustration in being taken out of the squad. ~~I'd had to remove others as well. I had decided that rather than the two dozen people I'd included the night before, we'd have a greater chance of success with a smaller group: sixteen in all, four teams of four.~~ Danny Brunner, one of our best officers, from Kibbutz Kabri, a Palmachniks Kibbutz (like Gordonia in MH) which produced many future soldiers and officers for The Unit along the years, he (like the fallen Nehemia Cohen) ,spoke very little, in soft low ,hardly audible way. And Usually preferred not to talk at all. But comes action, he was great. Clever, thoughtful, accurate. Avoiding troubles before they materialize. I really liked him. I put Mordechai Rachamim with him on this critical left side leading door. Marco Ashkenazi, the short time Egyptian MP, was mow an air marshall as well. I put him with Bibi at the leading door on the right side. And Omer Vachman, an officer in the reserves, and air marshall as well, together with him Danny Ardity, from Yiron, the Kibbutz from which we started our Lebanon "proof making" mission in 62'. By then Yoni reached the Hangar. He joined the unit some 7 months ago and served as commander of the Training Group made of those teams who were still in

their 12 months of special Unit training (after spending 5 months in basic Tironut with the Batllion 890). He did it very well. But found himself extremely far from the basis overseeing their training. So, he came late. He approached me and asked to join one of the teams. There was some logic in it. He was more experienced facing live enemy fire than most of oer officers. Clearly more than Bibi. Yoni well knew the unwritten rule we had. You do not put two brothers into the same tightly crewed special operation. Reason being that it is wrong to run the risk of their parents having to mourn two of their sons if things went wrong. We had it with Nehemia, who would not flown (alive), in operation with Cheetah, as the pilot. I had it with My brother Avinoam, When put him into a Yairi team who fought in a different site, rather than mine during an early Anti Terror operation in late 64'. We always made sure Danny and his brother Ehud won't be together under potential fire. I told him 'Yoni that's too late. Bibi spent already few hours here training in and out of the 707, with his soldiers. He told me 'I'm going to talk to him' I didn't think he got a chance but didn't want to stop him. In some five minutes both came to me. Bibi said ' Yoni wants to replace me. We want ***you*** to decide'. It didn't take me a second. I assume they both

knew what I'll decide, but preferred that I'll announce it, so they can spare any bad blood among them.

I told them 'today it's Bibi'. And added, ' Yoni, that's not the last operation. I'll make sure you'll be there next time'. Yoni wore/ turned into a somewhat sad/insulted face. But had to accept it.

The last air marshall to join was Zur , a tall , thin somewhat red-haired Kibbutznik, the Brother of Amiram Levin's wife. He landed last and could hardly train himself for 15 minutes, before I've got a word that Dado ,Talik, Ghandi, Yariv and Yona Ephrat with half a dozen personal aides, are coming to the Hangar and want to see a full rehearsal of the operation. Time was running out. But it was not a bad idea to have it. In special operations, especially critical ones, with National level attention, risks and sensitivities, it does not suffice to instill the can-do forward moving spirit and self-confidence in your execution team, you need to instill enough self confidence and confidence in ***you***, in the minds of those who make the decisionsand in a way taking responsibility vis-à-vis the public as well as public/political risks.

They came in. I shortly presented the teams. At first ,I thought of bigger teams, probably even with 3-4 ***real***

Airport Mechanics, who can be seen as really working on something (if it takes more than few seconds before fire opens), rather than hovering like aliens, with our screw drivers and ratchet tools, over the bolts and nuts of the airplane knowing not what to do. But messages I've got from Yona clarified to me that negotiation with Captain Rifaat would not enable more tha 12. On 3-4 small golf-car like electrical buggies. We had 15. Couldn't further cut it. We showed them how the emergency exit doors are opened from the out side. Then, with doors back in place we allow them to choose sits as they wish all around the cabin, and two minutes later. Climbed nonchalantly on the wings and the signal, stormed the airplane. They were quite impressed.After all we were just three hours after the idea ever raised, in the room under the Tower Control. We didn't even sat down to summarize it with them. Dado just said.' OK, gentlemen. We've seen it' to his colleagues. Then 'Ehud, you have such a short time. Don't waist it. BeHatzlakha' (be successful), and they left. We still had to gwt the Mechanics white overalls. To find the right size and get used to move in them. We got to change boots to Black boots to avoid noticing our parachutist background. We decided to carry on the pistols on the belt inside the overall. Got acquainted with the electric

Buggies. And the tools carriage boxes. There were four buggies in a train –like connection, we towed behind two short and two tall upright ladders.

We had a final short talk. I spoke, telling them: ”No way to overestimate the importance of the coming hour, and especially the few minutes of action, to The Unit, the IDF, and the State of Israel. It is in our hands now .And we have to execute it. The first five seconds are the most critical ones”, I repeated. “We all know, it never occurs according to pre plan or our wishes. We, each and everyone of us has to be intensely focus on swiftness, momentum and accuracy. To reach fire contact in seconds, kill the terrorists and neutralize the explosives. No one is waiting for any one else. From signal on, or if fire opened, or on any twist along the way, we act as if each team has to accomplish it all alone. Assume, we ***all*** do. Keep cool. Focused, and rely on your instincts. We are ready for the mission. And we’re going to accomplish it.” I talked to them for 90 seconds.

Shay contacted me. The situation around the airplane is quiet. From time to time he sees a moustached guy, probably the leading terrorist looking out from the open cockpit window even stretching little bit outside ,as if to see better. We climbed on the small buggies, I’m on the

first one just by the driver, towing the whole “train” behind. trying to hang loosely not in an orderly manner. Civilian like. Slightly after 1600 we’ve got the last approval to move. And we were on our way. It was some one and a half mile of slow drive. I looked backward and so people thinking to themselves, minutes before an action. Many of them are awake on their feet, like me, for 30 plus hours. Some almost 48. Some exhausted from trans atlantic flights of almost twelve hours, during which they are not supposed to close their eyes for a second. They all,also face fear. It grips you when you are passive/idle, free to imagine, much less when you are into attention demanding action.

[EB. Consider whether its good here or probably placed after the operation, in order not to reduce the tension and the perceived risk.EB] Several hours earlier when we sat down with Ghandi, discussing the implications of his idea, Dado asked me ‘what are the risks that they will blew out the airplane?’ I told him: ‘There ***is*** a risk they will. However, I don’t think they came here to commit suicide. They could have done it over Europe, long before, or over Tel aviv, just before landing. Most probably they came genuinely to release prisoners. Having said that, everything could happen if it becomes clear to

them that they are going to die anyway. Or once fire is opened and people, terrorists included, get confused or panicked" I added, "That what makes surprise and swiftness of action, so critical."

I did not explicitly discussed these arguments with the teams, just threw parts of it, handoff, while overseeing their training as if a matter of fact issue, self obvious observations. I knew without asking that each and everyone had at some moment the view of a dark mushroom arise from the exploding plane. We'd all saw such pictures when Palestinian terrorists blew up airliners in the Jordanian desert in 70'(?CHECK DATES), or when The Unit blew up few civilian jets in Beirut Air Port in 68'. It could happen .It is not the more probable scenario. These were another times. If someone would have dared to assume under similar situation today, that a terrorist group, whatever it's stated objectives are will be reluctant to commit suicide, I would think he is insane. [EB.UP TO HERE.PL consider whther to put it later.EB]

Shay contacted me on his radio, from the hidden place near the airplane. He sees some activity, one or two, seemingly not the terrorists came out they are walking away from the airplane, one of them is probably the Red Cross guy. Now they stopped some 120 yards yards

away from the airplane on the tarmac. It followed by a communication from the Tower command post informing me that the red cross guy is going to check us on behalf of the terrorists. I Stopped the convoy when we reached the group which included the RC guy as well, civilized fragile, soft speaking benign Swiss, or probably Belgian gentleman, accompanied by two of the crew, probably thr captain one of them but im not sure. They did notintroduce themselves, they checked us very shallowly. And all passed it ok. But Bibi. I did not noticed it ,but he was the only one who didn’t changed boots. The red boots are in Israel like stating “I’m a parachutist” so the guy raised the overall pants sleeve, and suddenly saw a pistol stuck in the boot, rather than at the belt, probably a private gesture to B grade western movies, or just personal twist. It should not have happened. Absolutely the wrong surprise at the wrong place and time. The RC guy get red and started to quarrel in French with the Tower over his radio set. It ended I assume with an answer he got, that this is just for personal safety. And that all in all, we are now working to relieve the plane, the prisoners and the terrorists. Thus, he takes too high risk, for his pay check , by blocking it. Israel will make sure his superiors will know who blundered the

opportunity to end it all peacefully. It took few minutes. Just before we left , the RC guy told us, the Head of the terrorists demands that we will stop by the generator. And thn, one by one will come underneath the cockpit open wide our front of the overall so he can see that we do not carry weapons underneath. When srated to drive toward the plane. I turned backward and passed my orders for the new situation. Three simple clear orders. Which were passed backward from buggy to buggy: Everyone passes his pistol to the rear/back side of the body in the belt. (no exceptions). I will go first. Look at me and do, each in his turn, the same. If at certain point we are exposed, we storm the plane from our positions, wherever we are.

There was a tension in the air. Something I knew from defining moments in previous operations, just before action. high adrenalin, tense focused calm, effortlessly noticing ***everything*** that happens around and it falls immediately into its proper context.

The terrorist, by now aka Captain Rifa’at sat in the copilot(?) seat, half a body out through the window,his right hand stretched down toward us and a pistol in it directed at us. He was about my age , probably slightly older. A bit unshaved, had dark hair, moustache and eyes,

a focused somewhat tense look. WE stopped by the generator . As nonchalantly as I could I get out of the buggy, walked toward the cockpit, stopped underneath the cockpit some three meters from the planes body, looked upward with a curious (rather than worried) look, the only look which feel natural for me to wear, and opened my oveall front wide open. I was bare chested, because of the heat and wore a civilian blue working pants, which we were using for civilian appearance in the Unit. He nodded in his head . I closed the overall and moved toward my position. Then, one by one, over some ten minutes all 15 of us were inspected. Once it was over some of us went back and brought the ladders The high ladders were not suppose to be pushed to the attack positions in order to avoid suspicion. But the short ones were attachrd to the wings and the “mechanics” started to “work”.

The terrorists at that stage, however tense, might also had every reason to believe they had won their test of wills with Israel, over the prisoner release. As our attack got closer, the ostensibly “freed Palestinians”, some 300 yards afar, yet within the Terrorists field of sight, began boarding out of the buses. They stood in rows some of them waiving hands, waiting only for the other plane which was slowly towed, to reach their

waiting point. So they could board and leave for Egypt.At first the prisoners 707, then the hijackers' one. Ghandi, like Arnan where deep in their souls- Directors. Directors of real –life dreams/movies turned endeavors.

I watched the teams for amoment or two try to verify . one by one, they are ***all*** in place. I was about to give the signal, which was a simple scout whistle made by sudden exhale through my two first fingers touching edges of each other in my mouth, when I noticed Bibi crouching under the plane's hull toward me. I stopped. He told me we haveto wait. Zur, the last joining airmarshall turned in half an hour into door commander in an operation which had never been executed before needs to give shit. I asked Bibi 'are you sure he cannot wait for five minutes?' Bibi answered ' he says everything went so fast. I just landed froma long flight I got a (I don't know the English word for fluid feces(?) I cant wait. I approved.her comes the most surrealistic situation I'd ever been through. A whole nation in suspense of the rolling out, dangerous drama. Ghandi's "Big Show", dozens of fire fighting cars from the whole region. Waiting out of sight of the hijackers, just in case the plane catches fire. Two dozens of ambulances at the end of the runway, and the biggest three hospitals in Israel, all around Tel

Aviv Petah Tikva area at supreme emergency state for the case of multi-dozens disaster. And we here at a spitting distance from the hijackers, all waiting for Zur. Zur crouches under the hull, and like a ballet or Jazz dancer try to liberate himself from the overall. Not that simple for his immediate task. Then comes the release, he carefully cleans himself, wears the overall. Luckily nothing happened. No one realized the idle nature of the “mechanics” activities. Zur finishes. He noded a thanks to me and went back to his position. I did not even reported it.It might draw attention. I assume some tense moments shared by the command post as well.

I gave Zur a minute and then WHISTLED. That was really fast.

[EB. Probably this is redundant. Look down for the detailed description. Pl give me your feeling.EB]I’ve stood few meters from the plane and could see all four reams doors team on the lest side. I’ve noticed that danny and gonen are pushing the high ladder toward the cokpit door, but then turned my sifht back and observed that all four are stiil on the wing, no door opened , it was already almost five seconds, Ive rushed and climbed on the wing. When I reached the rear door the first one fell inward Mordechai enterd . in front of me the soldier was

trembling. I gave him a strong slap on the back and just said ‘move in’ . Tremble disappeared, the door fell. They moved on. I’ve saw now that Uzi is still out, I jumped from the wing and ran toward his high Ladder, than entered the cabin behind them and walked the whole way to the cockpit, full of shocked passengers. Uzi dealt with one of the female terrorisrs, Bibi and Marco held the other woman, the two man were dead[EB.Till HERE. Is this redundant?EB].

But here what happened chronologically:

~~For another reason, I even had to exclude Yoni Netanyahu. Bibi’s team was needed for one of the doors: the plan called from me to take one wing of the plane, and him the other. I guess I assumed that Yoni knew that meant I couldn’t include him. Like all units, we had an unspoken rule not to take two brothers on an operation, in case the worst happened. But while I didn’t know this at first, Yoni had been pressing Bibi either to get me to waive that rule. In the end, they came to me. Yoni made his case. Bibi made his: essentially that it would be wrong to run the risk of their parents having to mourn two of their sons if things went wrong. I told Yoni that~~

Bibi was right. “But there will be other operations,” I added. “I’ll make sure you’re there.”

Now, however, we were focused on ensuring we had the strongest teams for each part of our four-pronged assault. Mine would handle the left wing, the one facing away from the terminal and the control tower. Mordechai would be first in one door and a young guy named Omer Wachman, one of our best marksmen, would take the other. Bibi’s team would be on the other wing. I assigned Uzi Dayan’s team the rear door. For the front of the plane, I put Danny Yatom in charge.

I trusted every member of each team to keep calm under the pressure, to react on instinct. That would be crucial. I knew that no matter how well we planned, the situation we’d face inside was impossible to predict or anticipate. Still, there was no escaping the fact that none of our teams had been in this kind of live-fire assault before. That was the main reason I inisted that Mordechai, our only truly battle-tested air marshal, would be the first to enter. The difference between success and failure might rest on a mere fraction of a second. I was sure there would be no hesitation in Mordechai.

As we waited for further word from Dayan, I also deployed Shai Agmon, with a half-dozen other men, in an overgrown area of brush behind the plane, on the side facing the control tower. As I explained to Dado, they were there in case the hijackers began killing passengers – or if they were rash enough to venture outside. With Shai and his team concealed, armed, capable and ready, Dayan would at least have an added option in his arsenal.

I continued training with the assault teams throughout the morning and into early afternoon – by which time we had managed several full-scale simulations. And by which time, I was also pretty sure that the real event was only a couple of hours away.

The “other idea” that Dayan had mentioned had come from Rechavam Ze’evi. The main reason it was accepted was because of a growing fear that the ordeal was heading toward a massacre. Around one in the afternoon on May 9, the hijackers sent out the plane’s captain with a sample of explosives they said they had wired to go off inside. When it was tested, it turned out to be the real thing. The pilot also told us there were not only two hijackers, which is what we’d assumed, but four. Two men, two women. All armed. The only reason the stand-off hadn’t already ended in disaster, Dayan was convinced, was that Aharon

Yariv had been negotiating details of the “prisoner release” with the lead hijacker, a man who called himself Captain Rifaat. Ze’evi’s idea was to *give* Rifaat his freed prisoners. Or at least *appear* to do so.

Much of the day was spent assembling 137 serving Israeli soldiers: as “Arab-looking” as possible, ideally Sephardi Jews fluent in Arabic. As it happened, I’d been doing something similar, even though I doubted that once our attack was underway, we’d be doing much talking. An added advantage of including Mordechai was that he was also an Arabic-speaker. So was my old roadblock partner from Egypt, Marco. I put him in Bibi’s team.

The “Palestinian prisoners” now traded their Israeli uniforms for tracksuits. They boarded buses. They were driven to an area a few hundred feet from the Sabena jet. Under the “other plan,” there was also a wardrobe change for us. The idea was so obvious that, when they told us, I felt that I’d failed in our preparations by not suggesting it myself. Instead of our sayeret uniforms, we changed into the white coveralls of El Al mechanics. We would be arriving for “last-minute checks” so that the plane could take off again with the freed prisoners.

Dayan felt that waiting until sundown was too great a risk now. Besides, the assumption – or the hope – was

~~that the new plan gave us an element of surprise in itself. At least for a moment or so, the hijackers would be expecting not commandos, but El Al mechanics. They also had every reason to believe they had won their test of wills over the prisoner release. As our attack got closer, the ostensibly freed Palestinians began filing out of the buses. They stood in a row, waiting only for the plane to be serviced so they could board and leave for Egypt.~~

~~We made our move a little after four in the afternoon. My team of four, and Bibi's, were on opposite wings. Uzi's was poised below the rear door. Danny Yatom's was crouched, near their mobile ladder, at the front. All that was needed was for me to give the agreed signal. It was decidedly low-tech. I whistled.~~

It was all over within 90 seconds. As I'd expected, the plan and the simulation exercises turned out to matter a lot less than the instincts and initiatives of the assault teams. On my wing, at least, the first stage went as anticipated.

[The first to get into fire contact was Uri Koren, climbing upward through the 'nose tunnel' he reached the net-like metal cover which was locked . But through it he

saw a foot. He shot at it. The foot disappeared, but it was Captain Rifa'at foot which turned wounded.

Danny and Gonen were less lucky. They did not succeed in opening the Main Door (this was not a door that could be made fallen by just a fist stroke) for more than a thin crack. They got a shot from within, that scratched Gonen and the door closed from whithin.

Mordechai Rachamim and Omer Wachman crashed open the two doors at almost the same time~~the same instant~~. Mordechai a little bit ahead. He entered his body in and shot, within two seconds he retreared out, realizing that he was shot at from two directions. By the time he retreated Omers' door fell, he saw an armed man facing him, shot first, at the head and killed him. By then Mordechai was once again in, exchanging fire with Captain Rifa'at who was near the cockpit. . Mordechai was back in now, was firing and firing and hitting Rifaat in the side., when they both had to recharge, (That was not an action movie, where you watch infinite magazines),it ended up that Captain Rifa'at had only five rounds and reloading the revolver is more time consuming than replacing magazines on the Berreta which had eight rounds. before realizing he needed to reload as The hijacker somehow scurried down the aisle and shut himself in one of the

toilets to reload. Crouching between two rows of seats to insert a fresh magazine, Mordechai ran after Rifaat, firing through the bathroom door, then crashing it open and confirming that the lead hijacker was also dead. – Mordechai did not lose a second He rushed back through the aisle, toward the center of the plane and identified the woman terrorist later known as Theressa Halsa, grabbing her hands, reaching into her vest and yanking out the battery from her explosive vest with which she'd repeatedly stated later,planned to blow up the plane.

[EB> I don't want to expose him. Let think how to make his identity protected.EB]~~Mordechai rushed in, fired off a couple of pistol shots, only to be forced out by a return burst of AK-47 fire from Captain Rifaat. Wachman, however, shot and killed the other male hijacker before he could react.~~ one of the soldiers on ~~The fourth member of~~ this wing ~~our team, right behind Wachman,~~ had frozen completely. He was shaking~~, not in fear I was certain, but more in a kind of shock at the sudden need to adapt to a situation he'd never experienced. Out of instinct,~~ I slapped him, hard, on the back ~~of his head~~. He looked at me, immediately uncoiled, nodded and rushed into the plane.EB]

~~At the front, Danny's team couldn't get the door open. But one of his guys, from underneath the front wheel bay, saw the faint outline of a man's foot above him, and fired – wounding Captain Rifaat. Mordechai was back in now, firing and hitting Rifaat in the side, before realizing he needed to reload as the hijacker somehow scurried down the aisle and shut himself in one of the toilets. Crouching between two rows of seats to insert a fresh magazine, Mordechai ran after Rifaat, firing through the bathroom door, then crashing it open and confirming that the lead hijacker was also dead.~~

Bibi's and Zur's teams where now inside the cabin too. They~~'s team~~ had been somewhat~~a few seconds~~ late in getting their two doors open. When they got in, the two male hijackers were already dead~~taken care of~~. So, the shooting by now slowed and was only ours.Mordechai was standing some what to the right, toward the cockpit with Theressa in Hands. He knew there should be another woman terrorist somewhere, so he pushed Theressa into Bibi's and Marco hands and moved towards the rear part of the plane~~That left the two women, and one of them was just inside one of the wing doors, hands across her chest, smiling. Mordechai somehow had sprung back into action~~

~~again~~, ~~grabbing her hands, reaching into her vest and yanking out the detonator belt with which she'd presumably planned to blow up the plane.~~ Bibi now grabbed her by her hair. But it turned out to be a wig, and it came off in his hand. She was screaming, not in fear, it seemed, but defiance and ~~rage~~. Marco instinctively hit her across the face, but using the hand in which he held his Beretta. It went off, and the bullet grazed Bibi's (upper) arm~~shoulder~~.

Uzi's team, too, had been late – not, as with Danny, because of any trouble with the door, but because they hadn't heard my whistle. But they were in now. Uzi immediately encountered a stocky man, blocking in his way, and fired several times – thankfully, only into his midsection. The man turned out to be a passenger, a film-maker from Austria (to check with Uzi). Still, there was the final woman hijacker to deal with. Several of the other startled passengers began pointing to the floor, just ahead of Uzi, near the rear of the plane. The final hijacker lay curled up on the floor – and holding a hand-grenade, with the pin out. Telling the woman loudly, sternly, calmly, not to move, Uzi wrapped his hand over hers, extracted the grenade from her grasp, finger by

finger, and had one of his men lead her out of the plane and down the stairs.

And that was it. It took 90 seconds. Much shorter than the time you've read it. Not to mention the writing it. There was only one tragic postscript. In the initial gunfire, one of the passengers, a 22 (?)-year-old woman~~girl~~ pregnant? named Miriam Holtzberg, from Kibbutz Lohamei Ha Getaot(Ghetto's wariors) had been hit. Though the man Uzi had mistakenly shot soon recovered, she did not. Ten days later, she died. Still, two of the hijackers were dead. The other two were in custody. The remaining 88 (93?) terrified passengers, and the crew, were free, safe, alive, unharmed. Levy's wife included.

I felt no sense of triumph, or elation, afterwards – and not only because of the injuries to the two passengers.

[EB. This belongs to feeling during NOT after operation. Lets connect this to a real battle(73?).EB From my first period in the sayeret, on the Golan, I'd found that while an operation was in progress, especially when there was a danger of failure or worse, a kind of calm enveloped me. It was as if I was seeing things from outside: calculating what had to be done as the situation unfolded, or what further danger had to be registered and

avoided, if the mission was going to succeed. And when it did succeed?[EB. Till hereEB>]

I did feel a sense of a personal *achievement*. More so a collective one. And, yes, some quiet pride, too, in an important job, well done. It was that way with our rescue of Sabena Flight 571 at Lod Airport.

It was, however, the first of our operations that we did formally celebrate – modestly, by old sayeret standards, but a celebration all the same. That seemed appropriate to me. More than with any of our intelligence operations – and with the stakes incalculably higher – we'd taken on a mission that had every prospect of failing, and we had done it. Without my saying so, everyone in the unit understood that my inaugural comments as commander, about our need to operate as a *full* special-forces unit, were no longer a distant wish. It was what Sayeret Matkal had become.[EB.by Jan 14 2016 I've modified Ch. 7 till this point.EB]

* * *

The country celebrated, too. Acres (? Is’nt it a little bit exaggerated?)of newsprint were devoted to the attack-and-rescue operation in the days afterward. Since the sayeret’s existence was still an official secret, the headline writers called us, variously, a “special” unit, a “chosen” unit and even in one case, because of our El Al mechanics ~~c~~overalls, “angels in white.”

Yet we had no trouble keeping our feet on the ground. The day after the Sabena attack, we went through the same, rigorously self-critical assessment of what each of us could have done better. How, if we had to do another hostage-rescue operation, could we make sure none of the passengers was injured? How could we improve co-ordination among the assault teams? How, of course, could we avoid shooting *each other*? Why had I, as commander, had to wait for someone else to suggest the idea of disguising ourselves as aircraft technicians – especially since disguise had always been a key element in our intelligence operations? And why had we failed to train – or at least train enough – with pistols ~~as well as Uzis~~?

These were not just academic issues. I knew that even if we were never again called upon to free a hijacked airplane, it was inevitable we’d be facing other operations – equally sudden, without the weeks or even

months of preparation we'd~~–~~ usually have for intelligence operations~~always insisted on in the past~~. Learning the lessons of Sabena was critical. I was sure that our broader special-forces capability would be called on. Because I was sure that the kind of *threat* that we could help confront was not going to disappear. And in fact, just three weeks after we ended the hijack ordeal, violence returned to Lod Airport. Three Japanese Red Army militants, recruited by the PFLP and trained in Lebanon, opened fire in the terminal building. They murdered 26 people and injured 80 others.

Just as in the sayeret's early years, I emphasized the need for us to *pro-active*. It wasn't up to us to decide which operations to do. Rightly, others had to give the go-ahead: Ahron Yariv and Eli Zeira, Dado and Dayan. In some cases, the Prime Minister herself. But it *was* up to us to take the initiative in evaluating, assessing and understanding specific threats and framing ways in which we, with our unique strengths, could provide a response. Not just framing, but planning specific operations. Training. Exercising. Presenting plans. Arguing for them. And giving the decision-makers something *concrete* to decide.

Even before Sabena, barely few ~~a~~ weeks went by when I didn't go to Eli with a ~~at least one~~ mission, or an idea on which I knew that – if approved – we were ready to move. Even before the Lod Airport massacre of May 30, several of the most complex of these plans centered on the obvious new threat of Palestinian groups in Lebanon. Before the civil war in Jordan, King Hussein had accused Arafat, George Habash's PFLP and Nayef Hawatmeh's DFLP of creating a state within a state. Now, they were doing much the same in Lebanon, with their headquarters buildings in southern Beirut spawning hijackings or terror attacks in international airports like Zurich's and now Tel Aviv's. From bases in southern Lebanon, Palestinian fighters were also firing Katyusha rockets and other weapons into northern Israel.

One of the operations I had planned, and refined, over a period of months targeted Yasir Arafat himself. We knew, ~~not just from reconnaissance photos but from cross-border~~, from public news, and at least once, through intercepted radio exchange ~~intelligence missions~~, that the day after an ~~particularly~~ intense Israeli artillery barrage hits a village with Fatah stronghold, close to Israeli border ~~of rocket fire,~~ Arafat would often tour the area, meeting his people and commanders.

The first imperative, if we were going to go after him, was to ensure we would know when he was coming. The Lebanese authorities, especially in the wake of the attempt to unseat King Hussein, were deeply suspicious about the Palestinian groups' presence, and their increasing firepower. They always tracked his motorcade on his "review the troops" excursions, reporting on how many cars were involved, which one Arafat was in, and their progress. Unfortunately, they usually used the land lines ,on the poles for reporting. ~~did not use ground cables – where, as in Egypt and Syria, we'd planted bugging devices – but spoke by military radio.~~ So, my plan included a careful choice of the village that will be the 'trap'. It was Shab'aa, in the isolated corner of Israeli-Syrian-Lebanese borders meeting, close to mount Hermon slopes. Followed by three stages. First, a one-night operation to bug the telephone land-line along the only road leading to Shab'aa, and along few weeks to learn the routine activities and reporting procedures together with their lead-time figures. Simultaneously, training the heliborne raid force of Sayeret soldiers. Second, on a day of our choice, find an excuse to heavily bombard the Fatah stronghold in Shab'aa and start follow the reporting of the Lebanese forces. Arafat had to

coordinate with the Lebanese Army his movements into the border zone, so we expected to know the night before, if his visit was approved. Third stage, would be following his convoy through the reports of the Lebanese checkpoints along his way from Beirut, which took some four hours. We had such a reporting once, in the past, when for some reason they used the radio, and the reports included a detailed description, down to the light blue color of the 'folkswagen beatle' which carried Arafat himself. At the right timing, on an isolated piece of a barn mountain slope road, some 8 miles long, a pair of F-4 jets will attack, in full day light, the head and tail of the convoy, as well as cut the road ahead and behind them with heavy bombs, and at that very moment four heliborne teams of The Unit will land around the event and grab Arafat and few others ,or kill them if they shot back. ~~So, with the technological unit, we trialled, and confirmed, a method for listening in. But in order to ensure the operation was on our terms, I also proposed that our own artillery units – a couple of days before we planned to move – open fire on a specific Fatah rocket site, in an isolated area about ten miles from the border at the bottom of the Bekaa Valley, with just one road in from Beirut.~~

~~The operation itself would involve our landing two teams by helicopter the night before, with a pair of Jeeps painted over with Lebanese Army insignias. We would lie in wait until his arrival, then cut his exit routes both north and south, and attack as he set back for his headquarters in the Lebanese capital.~~ I took the plan to Head of Operations in the Kirya Bunker, who was happy with it but sent me to the Head of Aman, the Intelligence, ~~to~~ Eli Zeira, who was also known to be close to Dayan and could help in convincing him. I knocked, and entered his office. I still remember: he was reading an issue of the French newsmagazine *l'Express*. He was, as he often did, eating salted almonds from a small dish on his desk. He was used to my coming to him with proposed missions, so he settled back in his chair, looking at me, over his lower-half lenses reading glasses, as I began. I spoke for less than 10 minutes. He needed no explanations of what Arafat's Fatah is doing in Lebanon. ~~At the beginning – as I ran through the *reasons* we'd come up with the plan, the bourgeoning power of Fatah and the other, smaller Palestinian armies in Lebanon – he nodded once or twice.~~ When I ran through every detail of the plan, he listened, focused/concentrated without any obvious sign of approval or rejection. But after I'd finished, he told me in a

quiet, but confident tone that Yasir Arafat was no longer the battlefield/terrorist commander whose forces had fought crack units of the our army in Karameh four years before. “Arafat, these days, he’s fat. He’s political,” he said. “He is not a target for this kind of operation.” It was final. A death verdict for the operation.

He, and Dado too, did seem more receptive after Sabena to our attempting to seize Syrian officers and trade them for the three Israeli pilots held in Damascus. But to abduct foreign nationals required not just military or intelligence approval (every operation beyond the border needed Def. Min. approval and usually PM). The Prime Minister would have to sign off on it. There was no immediate sign that our raid on the officers’ club north of Damascus was getting closer to being okayed. At certain point Uzi Dayan went, one evening, directly to his Uncle residence in Zahala, and told him bluntly:” Moshe, all of you up there, are probably too old to understand it, but these pilots in the Syrian prison are our friends, if ***we*** were there in prison, we would expect them to do whatever it takes to get us out. They, I’m sure, expect the same”. It did not work/in Vain.

What happened – very much as with Sabena – was that events on the ground forced the issue. In this case,– on

Late evening of June (?) 11, 72' ~~our T-junctions in Syria gave us notice that in June,~~ just a month after Sabena, our intelligence issued a notice to the Kirya HQ that a group of senior Syrian officers was going to make tomorrow, an inspection visit to the south Lebanese border area, on the eastern sector, bordering on Hermon mountain.

We did not get this info at all. Probably only early morning Monday ,June 12th, remembering our consistent nudging(?)/(pushing), someone noticed the opportunity.

On 8am I got a short note, in 20 minutes Dado and Motta, Chief of Staff and North Commander respectively will land at your base.

Their chopper landed. Both were on their way to a brigade level exercise in Ze'elim in the Negev. We sat in my commanders' modest room. Dado, briefly describe the opportunity and directly asked me: "can you abduct them tomorrow?" Even while he described what he knew at the time, I as already running time-lines in my head. It was not a simple question. We have to cross border on foot , in some 12 hours, early tonight in order to reach the place and be ready when the sun rises tomorrow . It will take some four hours drive just to reach Har Dov on the Mt. Hermon slopes, where we had to start. It meant we had 8 hours for planning, briefing, training, arranging the

equipment, explosives , faked barrels, puncturing strips, weapons and munitions, studying the maps and air photos and then executing an abduction operation. On the other hand this ***is*** a real opportunity. Pini Nahmani, Boaz Eitan and Gideon Magen are more than two years in prison.

Who knows when and if it will repeat itself?

Again, this was a mission for which we hadn't specifically prepared. But unlike our assault on the hijacked plane, we had trained for, and actually completed, operations somewhat like it. In preparing for the desert roadblock scheme to try to seize Egyptian officers, we'd practiced how to subdue and abduct them, even if we ran into a patrol or an ambush. And as our T-junction operations had become more complex during the War of Attrition, our simulation live fire exercises took account of the likelihood we would have to fight our way in or out. The place where we now planned to intercept the Syrians was also an area I knew well. It was on the last two miles of the narrow mountainous road to Shab'aa, the village of the aborted plan to hit Arafat, we went more than once, in the past, beyond Shab'aa.

I said: "we will do it". He asked me how? and I briefly described to him the way we usually planned to

overwhelm a short convoy. ‘We are going to rehearse it in the coming few hours. You can come and see around 1230pm.

Everything went parallel, There was a Lebanese checkpoint some 600 yards behind a road curve from our chosen point. We planned to allocate a squad to deal with them. There was a need for more people, and enough firepower to deal with two or three armed and manned vehicles which might escort the officers, and at first look they should see a reasonable yet solid checkpoint. We took care of all these, sent Amnon Biran, our Unit intelligence officer to drive north immediately and coordinate with the Northern Command and the Golan Heigths sector commanders. We built the Hillutz and the main force and trained them ,’dry’, no live fire, on different scenarios. At noon time, only Dado came back, Motta continued directly to make sure his Northern command be ready. We made a run of the exercise with four jeeps ‘Playing’ the visiting officers and their escorts.

Dado was satisfied and gave his approval and blessing to move on. Within further 2 hours we were on our way to the North.

We reached the border later than planned and could not stop at either the Northern Command in Nazareth nor in the forward command post af the region. But I relied on my

Intelligence officer to brief them on how we planned it. And anyhow it was my Hillutz which will be the only force to intervene if get into trouble.

With the officers' convoy expected to pass through sometime on the morning of June 13~~0~~, we crossed the border three ~~a couple of~~ **hours before midnight. There were** three~~a~~ **dozens ~~of us in all.~~** We had to cross the valley just over the border, heavily bushy slope, some 1000 feet deep, at its foot a streaming gorge. We were equipped with cables to cross it. But as e were prepared to cross there came a call on the radio. Amnon Biran, my man in the regional forward command post on Har Dov. ~~We stationed ourselves in a narrow gorge. I'd chosen the spot because in addition to making it unlikely we'd be seen, it gave us a vantage point on a curve in the road a half-mile away, meaning we'd have warning of the officers' approach~~

~~. We were assuming there would be at least three vehicles, but probably five: the Syrians in the middle, with Lebanese army escorts on each end. We were right about that. A little after noon, a couple of army Land Rovers, followed by two American-made cars and another Land Rover, made their way around the curve.~~

~~But we never got the chance to intercept them. Just as they appeared,~~ I was contacted by radio by an officer I'd first met when I was barely out of basic training. He was now in charge of the main brigade in our Golan ground force, and he said he had a message for me from Motta Gur, He used Motta's 'code number' for the radio networks. The northern command's intelligence unit said there was a Lebanese Army checkpoint a quarter-mile from where we were planning our ambush. From the depth of the valley~~. Gur himself was in the south, with Dado, preparing to watch a tank exercise. So, much to my frustration,~~ I had no way of talking to Motta,~~him~~ directly. I replied through ~~–~~Amnon~~the go-between~~. "Tell Motta, we know about it, it is into the plan" I said. "It's no problem."

~~That was half-true. Though we'd seen reconnaissance photos before setting off, either the checkpoint wasn't there, or we'd overlooked it. Still, either way, I was confident it wouldn't change things.~~ There were probably four or five Lebanese soldiers, at most, manning it. The last thing they'd want to do is get involved in a firefight between us~~, the Syrians, and the Lebanese escort vehicles~~. " Motta wants you to cancel" came the answer. I was furious. What the hell is this? Why suddenly now? What can they know that I don't? I asked

Amnon to give me the regional brigade commander. They were sitting together. He was a Col. I knew well. Zuri Sagi (sheinkin), a tough, seasoned commander and a former 101 fighter, who never came back without completing a mission. All of us highly respected him. Motta as well. Zuri had been more than once in ***his*** career executing missions which were hastily prepared, yet, were urgent and were accomplished. I talked to him and asked him to convince Motta to rethink and let us go. I have no doubt were his sentiment laid. But in ten minutes the unequivocal verdict came on us : “Kazakh !!!”, an Hebrew acronym for ‘overall tail curling’(?), The mission was off.. I’d never climbed an uphill slope so deeply furious and frustrated.

~~**It** *would* be OK. And we were probably just two or three minutes from being able to make any doubts academic. The guy checked back with Motta, however, and Motta’s reply was unequivocal. The mission was off.~~

Amnon Biran was left behind to watch how the Syrian border inspection in Lebanon would look like. We were assuming there would be at least three vehicles, but probably five: the Syrians in the middle, with Lebanese army escorts on each end. We were right about that.

An hour before noon, a couple of army Land Rovers, followed by two big American-made cars and another Land Rover, made their way around the curve drove to Shab'aa, an hour later they drove back.

But we never got the chance to intercept them. We were on our way back to our base.

Exasperating though that was, when we got back to Sirkin, I was reassured to learn that there was more to his veto than I'd thought. It was not mere commander's caution. He, and Dado, had received intelligence faintly **suggesting the Syrians** might be~~were~~ **undertaking a** ~~whole~~ **series of** several **inspection tours of the border area. So we'd be** probably able~~likely~~ **to get another crack. And we did.** Iit was aweek later, on July 17 72'.**This time, we had a full 36 hours' notice. We were told that they'd be visiting the western part of the border on the** Nine~~Thir~~**teenth of June. On the** western end of the **Lebanese** border~~side~~**, it was known as Ras Naqoura, on ours as Rosh Hanirkra, a dramatic rise from the Mediterranean coastline up a** Kirton(?)(relatively soft sediment rock}~~granite~~ **ridge that, once into Israel, sloped down** into a flat coastal plain spreads **toward the port city of Haifa.**

We crossed the border and walked at night for some two hours, then arranged our ambush and well camouflaged

ourselves. Uzi Dayan and I, with his team and a dozen other men I'd chosen for the ambush, settled down in a tangle of bushes on a curve about half-way up the road. Muki with a team, hiding in the bushes,some forty yards higher along the unpaved steep trail/road, to cover the leading vehicles when we attack the American cars. And Bibi's smaller squad, with Kalashnikovs and rocket-propelled grenades some half a mile north, at the bottom part of the road as it began its long, snaking climb toward Rosh Hanikra ridge, in order to isolate the area, once the operation started.

~~I took Bibi and his team again. But once we'd crossed the border the night before, I stationed them~~, ~~with Uzis and rocket-propelled grenades in case of trouble, at the bottom part of the road as it began its long, snaking climb toward Rosh Hanikra. Uzi Dayan and I, with his team and a dozen other men I'd chosen for the ambush, settled down in a tangle of bushes on a curve about half-way up the road.~~ Sun rose in time, ~~w~~We waited, knowing we'd get an early warning and brief description of the convoy, from Bibi and then be able to see the convoy as it twisted its way toward us. Again, I had no direct link to Motta. But both he and Dado were following every step of the mission from a command post inside Israel. We were in something

close to real-time communications if necessary – through a friend and former sayeret officer named Amit Ben Horinhum, who had joined Egoz, the Sayeret ofMotta in the northern command for a kind of tour of the 'normal' army, each of us tried to have. Amit with his Egoz soldiers, was the Hillutz commander and deployed, hiding, over, and was in Rosh Hanikra, high up, immediately across the border.

The first vehicle appeared at around 10:30 in the morning. Though we couldn't see it, Bibi radioed us. But there was only one this time: a small armored car, with a 40 mm main gun and a single machine-gun. It drove unsuspectingly past Bibi and his team and, 150 feet further, to the point where the road began its climb. Then it stopped and the two guys inside, covered the car partially with a comoufalge net, took out a small table and a couple of small metal chairs and settled in to brew up some coffee on the roadside. "All OK," I said when I radioed Amit to tell him about the armored car. "Pre-deployment." It was a's reasonable exactly the way to I would have run advance security for a visit of foreign had I been in charge of organizing a visit by *our* senior officers. About 30 min later, Amit reported the he sees another light armored car, identical description, took

position at the top of the slalom, about a mile and a half afar. They stayed inside the car.

Adapting for the new situation, I've ordered Bibi that once shooting start at our Ambush Site, if the crew get back toward the Car and tries to turn upward, he should shot at them with their RPG and the Kalashnikovs and than cut contact into the heavy bush and bolders area, into which the car can't follow them anyhow. I've also ordered Muki to be ready to block with his fire the other car if it will later appear driving downwards.

Bibi was the first to report he sees what he believed is the convoy driving towards us. I immediately reported to Amit, And he passed on to the command post that I am taking on them. I could sense tension rising in at least a few of the ambush team. The tension didn't worry me. That was normal. I was sure it would evaporate once the operation started.But, To my shock, the answer came: "Not yet!. What will happen with Bibi's squad near the armed car?".they added. "What's the problem?, he will shoot at them and cut contact into the bush and boulders" I answered impatiently. "No approval for action!" the answer came through Amit. Twice repeated.by that time the convoy was just 30 seconds from us. 'No action' I've ordered.

Trying to control my rage. Hiding in the heavy vegetation we watched the passing cars: two Lebanese Land Rovers, a pair of light beige long American cars, and the trailing Land Rover. Distance was some two yards. We could see every detail hear the Gandarmeres, all armed but talking, undisturbed, with each other. Looking at the faces of the Syrian and Lebanese senior officers in the American cars, Full size Chevrolet Impalas, then the closing landrover.~~The convoy, when it arrived two hours later, was the same as the first time: two Lebanese Land Rovers, a pair of jet-black American cars, and the trailing Land Rover. They started to climb toward us. Even though I was sure we were ready~~,

~~I could sense tension rising in at least a few of the ambush team.~~ “Not now,” I told Uzi. “We’ll get them on the way down~~.” The tension didn’t worry me. That was normal. I was sure it would evaporate once the operation started~~

I radioed through Amit. ‘We saw them close distance. It’ll be easier than I thought. I’m going to do it when they come back, down hill.’ In fact there were bad and good news in taking them on their way back.Bad: they will probably drive faster. Hopefully the upper side armored car want join them. Good: We already ‘know’ them,they’ll be more tired, and it will be closer to darkness, making

following us more complicated. There was hasitation on the other side. Some ten minutes later,~~,~~ ~~especially since Motta's veto of the first mission had given us a couple of extra days to train. The reason for waiting was simply that we'd get a close look at the convoy on the way up – how many people in each vehicle, how well armed it was, how quickly they were moving. And they were bound to be less alert at the end of the day, on the way down. Even better, depending on when their inspection tour ended, it might be nearly dark. All of which I told Dado and Motta, through Ami on the ridge in Rosh Hanikra.~~

~~But as we were waiting, so was Israel's chief-of-staff and the head of the northern command. A couple of hours later,~~ Ami~~t~~ radioed me with a question from Dado and Motta~~i~~. "Wh~~at's with~~~~ere's~~ the armored car?" It was beginning to feel like we'd been in this movie before. "It's still there," I said. "But there's nothing it can do." As elegantly as I could, without going into every detail, ~~on the off-chance that the Lebanese or Syrians were listening in,~~ I tried to explain that it was on its own, ~~200 feet~~half a mile from ~~below~~ where we were going to ambush the convoy. Even if the two guys – now, again, busy with their coffee – were sufficiently suicidal to

want to rush into the fray, a massive~~single~~ burst of Kalshnikovs~~Uzi~~ and RPG fire from Bibi's team would take care of them in a matter of 15 seconds, and Bibi will cut contact into area they can't see into, not to mention drive into, if they'll be still capable of driving at all'. "It's OK," I said.

(I came very close to not telling Amit what happened a few minutes later: a lone Lebanese, a shepherd with his small flock, literally stumbled on us. One of Uzi's men, a fluent Arabic-speaker, quickly tied the startled man's arms behind his back, covered his head so he wouldn't see too much, scattered the sheep, and told him: "It's fine.– keep quite and in few hours~~Another hour or so~~, we'll be gone, and we'll let you go."

It was less than an hour, however. Forty-five minutes. During which, not once but twice, Amit asked ustold ~~us that Dado and Motta were worried. a~~About the armored car. And now, also about the shepherd.

I replied, twice, that everything was fine. We'd do the operation. The guys in the armored car would be helpless. ~~If all went well, they might not even know we'd intercepted the convoy.~~ And the shepherd, like us(?), was just waiting for it(? He couldn't know what happens and what is "it") to be over so wewe could all go home.

Minutes later, Amit called me again. He told us the convoy was on its way back down.

Then, barely 60 seconds afterward, he said: “It’s off. Don’t do it. Dado told me to repeat it so you’d understand: do *not* do the operation.” Deeply frustrated, outraged, we followed the Syrian officers and Lebanese escort, minutes later passing us , downwards this time. We waited till the armored cars left as well, and when it was almost dark, left the area back into Israel.

By the time we got back to the operations post, I was fuming. Not only were Dado and Motta there. Motta was within days of leaving his post to become Israel’s military attaché in the embassy in Washington, seen as a stepping-stone to eventually becoming a candidate for chief-of-staff. So his successor in the northern command, Yitzhak Hofi, aka Hakka ,had joined them. He had been overall commander of the officers’ school when I’d done my course there.

Three times, I propossuggested to Dado that we speak alone, without my team leaders present. Uzi Muki and Bibi were as upset at I was at having had to let the convoy pass just yards in front of us. For Bibi it was anyhow his last operation in The Unit, before leaving the army, for studies in the US. ~~But I doubted it would help my~~

~~relations with these three generals to have my own officers hear me, still a mere lieutenant-colonel, tell them how I felt.~~ Still, Dado insisted that there was no reason for my fellow sayeret officers to leave.

"For the second time in a week, you've made us stop an operation". ~~"This is a serious issue,"~~ I told the three senior commanders, determined to keep my voice lower, and steadier, than my emotions. " That single,isolated, armored car should not block us, you, or the State of Israel from completing the abduction. Doing what had to be done", I opened. "An effective special-forces unit cannot serve the Nation without having your trust. Trust and loyalty is a two-way road. They should flow both directions. You cannot replace me, in judging the nuances of my situation, or my enemy, out there in the field. That's ***my*** responsibility" I added. "You've acted as if you *know.* You don't know. You *can't* know, from here. We, the ones who have to do it, ***knew*** it could succeed". I tried to turn softer. " ~~"What happened out there is unacceptable. An effective special-forces unit cannot operate this way. For the second time in a week, you've made us stop an operation. Both times, it was an operation that we, the ones who have to do it, knew would succeed.~~ This ~~An~~ operation is related to the ~~on which the~~

fate of our three ~~Israeli~~ pilots ~~depends~~. We were stopped twice. It cannot happen again. ~~One of whom I, and other sayeret officers, have *worked with*. Now, again, with no reason, you've stopped us.~~ I see this as a breach of trust." When neither Dado nor Motta replied, I went on: "I have to tell you, openly/ frankly. I don't want to reach a point when I have to start thinking ,while leading an operation from the front, about what to report, or what not to report, just in order to make sure we're free to complete a mission that *you* ordered and we ***all*** know, could be ***crucial*** for Israel." ~~For the first time since I've been in the army, I am beginning to think of not telling you the truth from the battlefield. Because although you can't possibly judge the situation on the ground, you're behaving as if you *know*. You don't know. You *can't* know, from here. There was no reason for us not to grab those officers. I don't want to reach a point when I have to start thinking about what to tell you, or what not to tell you, just in order to make sure we're free to complete a mission that ***you*** *agreed* is necessary for Israel."~~

No one said anything for a long ~~few~~ moment ~~s~~. They had never heard, in recent years, something like this. I could see that both Uzi, Muki and Bibi were shocked/tilted at

having heard me speak in this way in front of the three most senior officers ~~who, at the end of the day, might hold our careers in their hands~~. In another army, or another period, such an explicit rebellious behavior might be the beginning of the end of young officer's career, or at least severely punished and never forgotten. Nothing of these happened. My instincts were right. The top ranking Generals were all Palmachniks. They had their own 'finest hour', 25 years earlier in 48',living (and winning) by the same defining value: "Truth first, however tough. Not hierarchy, nor good manners". And~~But~~ I meant every word of it. They looked at each other. They knew I am right. Going at me would betray whatever they stood for in their own life, serving Israel. Integrity, theirs own, won over, for this time at least.

~~If Sayeret Matkal was to function as a special-forces unit, it needed to be able to rely on the trust of those who'd authorized an operation in the first place.~~

It was Dado who replied. Sort of. He told us a joke, from his~~his~~ Palmach arsenal~~days~~. "There are two bulls who come into a field/meadow (was the word he used, somewhat poetic word in Hebrew) full of cows. A young one and old one. The young one says to the old guy: let's run over there, to the far end of the field, where the prettiest

cow is, and we can fuck her. The old bull replies: “No need to rush. Let’s go slowly, and fuck them all.” I guess we were meant to be the young bulls.

A sigh of relief and a controlled smile on the faces of my officers signaled that the ‘crisis’ is over for them, as well. I did not want them to witness it, to start with. Now, by the end of it, their respect for Dado grew even more.

~~I guess we were meant to be the young bulls.~~

I doubt that Dado knew at the time that we’d get a third chance at the Syrian officers. I am sure that he hoped so. And we did get word, Just the next day ~~a week later~~, that there would be a final inspection visit – to the central part of the border on July 21st, the day after. This time, I was taking no chances. Ordinarily, I would have led this attempt as well. ~~I did not see the command of~~ Sayeret Matkal – should be led from the front. ~~as a desk job~~. ~~I assumed that,~~ especially as the unit undertook a broader range of operations, I would be there, leading it, to make sure we succeed, as well as to meet the same challenges, and run the same risks, as I was ordering ~~asking~~ the rest of my ~~the~~ (sayeret)/fighters to face. T~~But now,~~ he right place of a Commander should be the one which assures, that the mission will be accomplished, however

demanding the circumstances might be. But now, it was all fresh. I could not be assured. I made an exception. ~~. To the surprise of my senior officers, and even more so to the chief-of-staff,~~ I decided, based on recent experience, that the most critical place to avoid this operation from being aborted, might be at the forward command post. The enemy and the elements, can not stop us. Our own commanders- can. And sometimes do. [EB. Ned, As usual, your version seems better.let's consider some combination .EB]there was a more pressing and important responsibility for me to fulfill. I would remain in the command post. With Dado, and with Yitzhak Hofi, since Motta had now left for the US. I made a point of telling Dado this was not out of pique, but out of need. "I've come to the conclusion that the only way I can fulfill my obligations as commander is to be with you. Because the real obstacle to the execution of our mission isn't out there, in the field. It's here."[EB. Very Good.]

We planned a "jumping/erupting Ambush" that will take its' place only once the convoy is in sight. For the main force,I placed Yoni~~, as my deputy,~~ in charge. H~~,~~e was my deputy and battle seasoned. A ~~a~~longside Uzi, Danni Brunner and his team. Two other teams, one led by M~~oo~~uki~~e~~ Betzer and the second by Shai Agmon, would act as blocking

units’, concealed a less than ~~half-~~a ~~-~~mile on either side, once the main force intercepted the convoy. We chose a spot along the border near the Israeli moshav of Zar’it. Two observation squads some two miles away on each side will report when the target appears and help following on developments. We equipped Yoni’s force with a pair of Land Rovers, with Lebanese uniform, colors and plates, and had them hide towards ~~over~~sunrise~~night~~ in the outermost of the moshav’s apple groves/plantation~~orchards~~, a mere 3~~1~~00 yards from the road on the Lebanese side of the frontier. The next morning, once we see the convoy approaching the point, they would cross through a gap we’d cut in the border fence, station themselves on the road in a way that ***blocks*** it, lift the hood of one of the vehicles and make as if they were trying to repair some sort of engine trouble. The moment the convoy will stop near them, they wiil pullout weapons, calling on a megaphone in Arabic: “Surrender and everything will be all right!” and take over them with minimal use of fire.

Having an immediate access to the Lebanese road, b~~B~~oth of the blocking forces were also a lot better equipped than in our two earlier attempts. They had Kalashnikovs ~~Uzis~~ and RPGs as Bibi had a week ago. They were in half-tracks, with heavy machine-guns as well, in

case the convoy chose to stand and fight. Muki even got a single heavy Centurion Tank with him.

Everything was ready .It was around noon when the Eastern observation point radioed: “they are coming!” followed by short description. ‘ Go Action!’ I’ve ordered Yoni. He Immediately moved and within two minutes road took position, Hood up,innocently blocking the road. What we didn’t count on was the appearance of an ordinary Lebanese driver, in a VW Beetle as I recall, puttering westward along the road– shortly after Yoni’s team crossed the border. He disappeared from sight of the observation points, then re- appeared driving eastward~~. The man actually waved at them. Quite rightly, Yoni simply let him drive on. Along with the other obvious reasons not to turn our fire on a civilian VW,~~ . He probably was the one who allerted~~it would surely alert~~ the Syrians and their hosts that there was something abnormal~~danger~~ ahead. P~~But as it turned out, not only the Lebanese motorist, but~~robably it was few ~~a group of~~ nearby farmers, ended up delivering a warning that a couple of stalled Land Rovers were on ~~beside~~ the road. The convoy, having evidently set off from Beirut through Nabattieh, then Marj Ayoun and approaching from the Ea~~we~~st, halted not long after passing

Shay~~Mookie~~'s force, who were concealed at the side of the road.

Had I not been in the command post, I'm genuinely wonder ~~pretty sure~~ what would have happened next: Surprise was lost, Contact not created yet, probably the same as in our previous two attempts might repeat itself.~~.~~ But this time, it was me on the radio, in direct contact with all three of the teams. Yoni radioed: "no one in sight. Want to move towards them". Even before I'd given the order~~,~~ ~~Yoni had anticipated it: he and~~ Uzi turned his landrover and started to move eastward. Yoni got my answer and followed. When Uzi reached the Convoy, they were already turning their vehicles around to leave the area eastword. Uzi closed on them, armed soldiers in Lebanese uniform disembarked. Zadok, who spoke Arabic, shouting through the megaphone:"Surrender!". The embarrassed convoy lost some critical seconds. When some one opened fire he was shot. Yoni and Brunner joined in 20 further seconds, with another 8 soldiers and fire exchange started. Distances, some 8-15 yards.~~and their team turned west and set off to confront the convoy.~~ In the brief, initial exchange of gunfire, Zadok ~~one of Uzi's men~~ was wounded, not seriously, in the leg. Three more Lebanese Gandarmeres dead. One of them after being hastily treated by our

paramedic. One of the Syrian officers managed to flee with a Lebanese into the bushes north of the road. And were not found.

I was at the command post with Dado and Hakka. We could see only part of the area. Not including the point of clash. I relied on the combination of what I saw, What I heard from the observation points and by listening to the flowing conversation on the radio. We were using codes which were created for this operation as well as several other radio talking practices of The Unit. Not easy to understand if you first time hear it. I was trying to minimally intervene, but always be there for orders and decisions. They, Hakka and Dado, followed me from close distance directing and ordering some half a dozen of moving forces and sub units. At certain point Dado, who like Hakka, watched me without talking or intervening, told me aloud: ‘Ehud,I cant read this battle anymore. It seems you still read it. I rely on you’.

Muki’s force ,the Centurion included had, by now reached Yoni and the main force. One of the Lebanese Land Rovers swerved out and tried made a run for it, toward a nearby village. ~~. But with Mookie’s team firing from behind the convoy, and Yoni and Uzi’s men from in front, they soon had it surrounded and subdued.~~ I ordered~~had~~

Shai's team go into the nearby village in pursuit of the fleeing Lebanese officers with time passing, when I learnt that the fleeing Syrian is NOT in this Landrover, I ordered Shai to come back., ~~and he located and captured them, too.~~

The safest way back would have been the way we entered, on a packed dirt path leading straight from the Lebanese border road to the parallel road inside Israel. But Yoni and Uzi –~~–~~fully exploiting 'freedom of action' spirit which I nurtured ~~acting exactly as I'd expect,~~ ~~–~~ letting them~~sayeret officers~~, ~~judging~~ judge the situation on the ground, ~~figured~~ decided that the main/urgent imperative was to get the officers into Israel as quickly as possible. At a not-inconsiderable cost to a pair of swanky American limousines, Uzi piloted each of them, with a total of five Syrian officers, across a boulder-strewn field and back across the border. Muki joined out. Shai ~~, with three captured Lebanese police officers,~~ followed another trail with his half-tracks.

The Syrians we'd captured were not just garden-variety officers. Three were high-ranking members of the Operations Department of the General Staff. The two others were from Syrian Air Force intelligence. Israel~~We~~ did make an immediate offer to swap them for our pilots,

though how enthusiastically, I'm not sure. With this kind of leverage on our side, it seemed unlikely the Syrians would do any further harm to our pilots until their officers were back in Damascus. *Our* intelligence officers, of course, were anxious to get every shred of information they could from the captured Syrians before we sent them home. Still, the exchange was, eventually, done. Almost exactly a year later.

The meeting with the Dado and Hakka, immediately afterwards was so different in mood than the previous one just 48 hours ago. For good reasons. Happy faces. Slaps on the backs. Warm handshakes. We were there some fifteen officers from The Unit. Young officers were genuinely moved. And proud. For good reasons as well.

We met again, t~~T~~he evening after the operation, as Yoni, Uzi, the other team leaders and I rehearsed its steps~~uccess~~ with Dado, I resisted the temptation to say we'd told them so. I didn't have to. The mission spoke for itself. Yoni, deservedly, received a commendation(?) for his role a few weeks later.

Our abduction of the Syrians had now firmly established the Sayeret Matkal in its expanded role. Yet I remember telling Eli, Ahron Yariv, and Dado at the time what I had already said to officers in the sayeret: that

the main challenge for which we would be needed was the kind of threat we'd encountered at Lod airport, and that it was likely to get worse. The new threat from an old adversary: terror attacks by Palestinian groups.

And barely two months later, members of the same group that had hijacked the Sabena plane – Fatah's Black September – seized and murdered members of the Israeli team at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich.

* * *

As soon as the news broke of the Munich attack, on the morning of September 5, I phoned Aharon Yariv. "You need to send us," I said. "We need to be there." Though neither of us knew how or when the ordeal would end, I tried to persuade him that if it did – like Sabena – come down to an operation to free our hostages, only we/ Sayeret Matkal held out maximizing the hope that it would not end in a bloodbath. This was not only because we had the mind-set, the background, the training, and now the experience for such a mission. It was because I knew that the *German* military had no special-forces unit at all. I'd have been even more forceful in my argument, if that were possible, had I known that German law barred the army

from operating in peacetime. Any use of force would be left to the police. But Aharah'leon said it was too early to say what involvement, if any, we might have. He'd get back in touch with a decision when it came.

I called few of the sayeret's officers together and began brainstorming planning anyway. The last thing I wanted was to find we'd got approval to fly to Germany, only to arrive not fully prepared. In my own mind, I'd already assembled the team I would take: the same ones, including Mordechai Rachamim, who had been with me for Sabena. Not only did they have the benefit of having been through a similar operation. They had, fresh in their minds, an understanding of how the terrorists might react when we burst in, and of the need to react as near to instantly as possible. I ran through with them the elements from Sabena that were sure to be crucial in any operation against the hostage-holders in Munich: above all, the need for surprise.

We collecated information from the stream of media reports from Munich and assembled at least a rough idea of the layout of the building the terrorists had attacked. As for the attackers, I said that we had to assume there were probably at least half-a-dozen; that they almost certainly had not just AK-47s but grenades or

other forms of explosives. And that, like the Sabena hijackers, they would be prepared to die but hoping to live. All of which turned out to be true. None of which, however, could alter the reply I got from Yariv a couple of hours later. “We decided to send Zvika,” he said.

Zvika Zamir was the head of the Mossad. Beyond the limitation of heading an intelligence agency which, accomplished though it was, had no special-forces capability or experience, Zvika was going only as an advisor. This meant any operation would still be in the hands of ill-equipped and ill-trained German units. I feared that one way or another, this was indeed going to end in a bloodbath.

Unwilling to give up, I called Moshe Dayan. At least, I pressed him, have me go with Zvika. “He’s not in a position to provide *operational* advice. And that’s what we need to keep things from going badly wrong. The Germans have never done anything like this. They don’t *know*. How to plan it. Certainly, not how to execute it.” Dayan said he didn’t know whether my going would be possible, but that he’d get back to me. If not me, probably one of my officers, just to prepare the background in case it’ll be needed. [(EB.We already did it once, sending a forward mission to Bangkok during a terror event.)] He never did.

Much later, I heard an explanation from a mutual friend that made sense: since it was clear that the German government, and German law, would prevent us from participating in any hostage-rescue attempt, if things *did* go wrong, the temptation would be to use our having given "advice" as an explanation, even as cover. In fact, that did partially happen, with Zvika. I can understand Dayan's concern that if I, as head of Israel's dedicated special-forces unit, had been there as well, the temptation would have been even greater.

(Still, I've never regretted doing all that I could to try to secure maximum input, ideally a full operational role, for the sayeret. I found, and still find, ~~the~~ the German police's bungled attempt to end the ordeal especially painful, because it was so predictable. **Nor have I ceased believing that if we *had* been there, at least some of the eleven Israelis, as well as the German police officer who was also killed, would not have lost their lives. Two of the athletes, it turned out, were murdered immediately.) An attempt to infiltrate the building where the hostages were being held failed before it even began. German border policemen, though they were at least dressed as Olympic athletes, were caught on**

international TV cameras as they approached – and seen, of course, by the terrorists in real time.

Ultimately, the Germans decided on an ambush operation at a NATO airfield outside Munich, when the terrorists and the hostages were ostensibly on their way to board a flight, with German government agreement, for Cairo. It went very similar to what ~~exactly as~~ I'd feared. There was no serious or co-ordinated plan. Too few people were involved in the operation. They were insufficiently, and inappropriately, armed. None had relevant training or experience. It was, indeed, a bloodbath. And though the three terrorists who survived were imprisoned, when a Lufthansa airliner was comandeered in October and the hijackers demanded their release, the German government promptly let them go.

Added to Israelis' shock, and trauma, over the Olympic massacre, there was now raw anger at having to watch the murderers go free, to the predictable heroes' welcome when they returned. In the weeks afterwards, I did get occasional hints that a sustained Israeli response was under way. I did not know the details. Aharon Yariv left the Military intelligence, replaced by Eli Ze'ira who just came back from Washington D.C. where he was replaced by Motta.

Ahrah'le Yariv now became Golda Meir's assistant for Anti Terror. At first, I was not aware, however ~~for instance~~, that it was ~~Aharon~~ Yariv, at the direction of Golda herself, who was co-ordinating it. Nor that a specially assembled Mossad team was at the center of the operation. Yet merely from news reports of intermittent attacks on "suspected" leaders of Black September, I assumed we were determined to convey a message which the Germans patently had not: that terror killings of the sort perpetrated against the Israeli Olympic team would not go unpunished.

It was not until November ~~late in~~ 1972, however, that I knew, rather than simply suspected, the scale of the campaign. We had no formal daily links with the Mossad at the time. But our work did occasionally overlap – for instance, when I was planning ~~–~~the attack on the Syrian officers' club near Damascus, since that required getting(?,Censor might erase it.EB.) forged Syrian military papers. In mid-December, the sayeret's own intelligence officer – a young man named Amnon Biran [EB. I've already mentioned him re the first kidnapping operation. He was the son of Yeracmiel, the ***real*** Schopenhauer and Spinoza enthusiast. EB.], from Mishmar Hasharon, whom I'd brought into the unit – was approached

with a “theoretical question” by Romi, and a couple of other guys from the Mossad. They wanted to know whether we had the capability to plan an attack on three separate flats, in a pair of apartment buildings in Beirut. I sent back my preliminary answer a couple of days later. Yes, I told them, it was potentially doable. But there was no way I could say for sure without more information: were the people in the apartments armed? Were there guards outside? Was there some sort of caretaker or concierge in the lobby areas? How about entry: was there only one way in to the buildings, or also rear entrances? And would we be able to get a plan of the interior of the apartments which we would be targeting?

In another month or so, they came up with answers to most of my questions. The buildings were ~~–~~modern ones~~fairly new~~, with glassed-in lobby areas and concierges on duty day and night. The Mossad men also gave us a fairly detailed layout of two of the three apartments. They had so far drawn a blank on the other flat. They did not yet know for sure whether there were back entrances to the buildings. They *thought* it was likely there were bodyguards, or at least some form of security detail, outside. They mentioned a gray Mercedes that was seen parking there with someone in it, more than

once. {{They also noted that at the end of the street ,some 250 yards away, there is an Gandarmerie station, and that probably this is part of an attempt having to feel more secure}}. ~~or at least some form of security detail, outside.~~ As for the people living in the apartments, they said it was likely all of them had access to at least sma~~ll~~ll~~ll~~ arms.

This led to a further couple of exchanges, and further questions, over a period of two weeks or so. Central to~~Mainly,~~ what I wanted to know was whether they can make~~were~~ sure the people we'd be looking for would be at home if/when there is an operation. The Mossad officers said they were working on that, but did not come with a definitive answer. ~~but that they were confident, before any operation happened, of being able to confirm this.~~ Though at first, they didn't explicitly identify the people they were targeting, I had by now learned, through our exchanges, ~~Aharon and others, what had been pretty obvious since the Mossad's initial approach~~. They were Palestinian leaders with ties to Black September.

The Mossad people never told us they want ***us*** to do it. But more likely were contemplating alternatives for something ordered to them.

“ It’s preliminary and needs a lot of work on details and overall envelope,” I finally told them, “But assuming you could answer the last question,’ were they at home in a given night?’ I think we can do it~~,~~” ~~I finally told them~~. “We’ll put a tentative plan in place. We can finalize the arrangements if we are formally asked ~~you come back and say you want us~~ to do it.”

I did, as a matter of course, update ~~tell~~ Yona Efrat, (he was no.2 to Ghandi/Ze’evi during Sabena, and now) no. 2 to Talik, Dado’s deputy. I shared with him~~,~~ that we’d been, somewhat unusually, approached informally by the Mossad. I filled him in broadly on what Mossad aske~~want~~ed, and what I’d replied. Yona listened carefully, then told me : ‘OK! Study the case. I’ll keep it in mind”. I didn’t know how to read it and suspected that I was the first one to tell him about the mossad flirt with us. ”Well” I answered, “I will have to involve several more officers in The Unit”. Till then under Mossad requests, no one beyond Amnon Biran and myself were aware of it. Even when I decided to take certain steps which were neede for this idea, like adding Muki to a routine submarine reconnaissance facing Beirut, in order to check possible landing sites, I’ve used some other explanations. Yona agreed. Thus, I happily followed with a brainstorming at

my office with Biran, presenting it to Amiram, Muki, Amitai and Zvika Gilad. You could not miss their enthusiasm. Biran first just stretched open an airphoto of Beirut and explain the place without hinting what's the mission. Then, non-challantly, yet on a verge of theatrical, pulled out the pictures of the three terrorists, put them on a table, and said: 'and these are the objectives.

There were so many initiatives on the table, mainly self-made, that we were involved in, we've dived again into them. But there, for several (some two) months, was where things rested.

My relationship with Dado had, by and large, survived our tensions(?) on the northern border unscathed. As his joke about the bovine fornication had suggested, I think he viewed my inclination to voice my opinions openly, even across a chasm of age and military rank, as just part of what made Sayeret Matkal unique. He probably saw a bit of the old Palmach in us. Young bulls. And to a large extent, he was right. There was not just a fundamental, physical self-confidence, bred of –training and hard work, in the sayeret. There was an intellectual

confidence, too. We did not behave differently within The Unit. I deliberately encouraged a norm of total openness in planning and debriefing. Ordinary soldiers were routinely part of brainstorms about what can happen and how to deal with surprises, which always occur, during operations they have to participate in. I was used to hear very blunt critic, in many cases justified, by young officers and soldiers during such events. Unity of action belonged to execution. And even there, with as much authority delegated downwards to encourage individual soldiers to dare, initiate and act, using what they actually see and their own courage and common-sense, to push through whatever difficulties, the completion of the mission.

We strongly believed iAn independence of thought and judgement.

One reason I'd found a natural home in the sayeret, I'm sure, was because I had always possessed those qualities, from my early act of defiance against my father's insistence I remain at the regional high school. My father, in that case, had been right, as it happened. But at various times since then – My insistence, as a new soldier in The Unit to resist Avraham intention to send me to a Morse-code communication course.[EB. An important

event we should put in the book.EB.] my insistence that Castel allow me to go to officers' school, for example, and my more recent run-in with Dado and Motta over the Syrian operation – I grew up with certain innate confidence, that when your case is right, or has to do with your very basic right to direct your own life, I have to stand firm against whoever turned to be the other side of the conflict. Some might see it as arrogant behavior, others as takingI had taken obvious career risks on points I felt that I needed, calmly and confidently yet strongly, to make to my superiors.

Another of them now occurred. The incident that prompted it occurred hundreds of miles away from Sirkin, in the Sinai Desert. It happened on an afternoon in late 21 February 1973. The weather was cloudy and unsettled. A large airliner, a Boeing 727, suddenly crossed into Israeli airspace, triggering an alert at a little before two in the afternoon. I can only imagine the consternation when Dado, and the air force commander, Mottie Hod, were alerted. This plane, whatever it was, had somehow crossed through Egypt's Soviet-manned missile and radar systems across the canal: probably the most densely packed and capable anti-aircraft defense system on earth. It was headed due east, in the direction of the

Negev Desert, Beer Sheba and the town of Dimona, which was the site of our main nuclear reactor. The initial response was virtually automatic. The Air Force~~We~~ scrambled a couple of our F4 Phantom jets from Refidim – the Israeli air base that had supplanted the Egyptians' at Bir Gavgafa. They intercepted the plane, dipping their wings in the internationally recognized signal for the 727 to follow the jets and land. But the pilot ignored them. No doubt, there was a back-and-forth with Mottie Hod, maybe Dado as well. But whatever was discussed, the order came a few minutes later: shoot down the plane. They did. It turned out to be a civilian Libyan airliner. All except five of the 118 people aboard were killed.

I, like most Israelis, and pretty much the rest of the world, were shocked (?), is this the best word?)by what had happened. I was also curious to know how, and why. So I asked Sivron, an old friend – a former helicopter pilot who had participated in a number of our T-junction operations, but who was now high up on the air force staff. I was particularly curious to find out whether media reports were true in suggesting that at the time the plane had been shot down, it was headed back west, in the direction of the canal. He told me yes, that's what happened. He was reluctant to go into too

much detail. But he did say that, as best he could work out, shooting down the airliner had been a “critical mistake” of judgement. He didn’t need to fill in the blanks. To my mind, even had the plane not already begun to turn back, there was surely sufficient time before it got anywhere near Dimona to consider all possible alternatives, and to make absolutely sure it was a threat, before downing it.

That issue was, to put it mildly, not any part of my brief. Even though I was commander of the sayeret, I was still a junior officer, who had only just turned 31. But part of what followed *did* concern me. Amid the controversy surrounding the incident, (it was announced that) Tthe chief of staff would be sending out a briefing note on what had ~~*really*~~ happened, and that all battalion commanders in the army would be using it to brief their officers on the justification for the Israeli action. When I received my copy, it didn’t take long for me to realize that it was *not* ~~anything but~~ what had really happened. I phoned Dado’s *aide de camp*. “~~“I don’t want to do anything improper,” I told him. “And~~ I ~~also~~ don’t want to do anything behind the Chief of Staff’s~~your~~ back~~. And if you feel you have to take some action as a result, it’s up to you.~~ .Thus,~~But~~ I want you to know, and you can

convey it to Dado, that, as commander of Sayeret Matkal, I'm not going to be ~~reading out your~~ brief~~ing to~~ my officers according to this booklet. Because I know, from a reliable enough source~~source who has no reason to mislead me~~, that the description it gives is too partially ~~not~~ true. That it's not how it actually happened." Dado's assistant thanked me for the call. I never heard back from them. I wasn't (?)cashiered. When, a couple of days later, several of my officers asked why they hadn't been given the briefing on the Libyan airplane, I told them~~.~~ that it didn't pass my standards for a proper briefing.~~it was better that they hadn't heard it. And that I couldn't, as commander, stand up and say something unless I was satisfied it was true.~~

* * *

By the early spring of 1973, with my two-year term as sayeret commander winding down, I had assumed that the Beirut operation had been put on hold, or perhaps vetoed altogether. (As we had continued to refine our own plan, it became clear to me that getting into the heart of the Lebanese capital, hitting the apartments, and getting out again whole, without starting a minor war would be the

most complex mission the sayeret had yet attempted) If given to us that was a great “first”. No one had ever done something like this. But it was far from being yet, ours. Mossad won’t let this slip from their hands, unless absolutely necessary.

But we did not hear from the HQ and my impression was it is still firmly at the hands of Mossad. I

{{{I had no doubt we were singularly prepared to carry out such an operation. But even for us, it would not be easy.(I assumed that whoever was making the decisions had come to the same conclusion.)}}}

I was on a rare weekend away with Nava and Michal when things suddenly began to move. We were in the Red Sea resort of Eilat. At around noon on Saturday, I got a phone call from the number-two to Talik as deputy chief-of-staff, an officer named Yona Ephrat whom I’d got to know during the Sabena operation. “Ehud,” he said, “we need you here. As soon as possible.” When I asked why, he was obviously concerned about revealing too much on an open phone line. “You remember how you told me two months ago that us you were approached by “our coleagues” someone with some questions?”, and you went back to them with a list of other questions for them to answer?” he asked me.

I said I’d be on the next plane back.

Telling Nava I'd been summoned to a meeting at the chief-of-staff's office, I took the first commercial flight north. I arranged to pick her and Michal up at the airport when they returned the following night. The flight takes some quiet/silent 45 minutes. I knew what Yona was talking about. I recalled our brainstorming some two months earlier in The Unit. We then discussed the main challenges, the knowns and unknowns of it. Where to land?, how to get from there to Verdun Street, how to act? , civilian? How many people we really need to perform without loosing surprise, which as always was *the* critical challenge? What weapons to use? Do we need explosives for the case the doors are heavily locked? How to overcome the concierge problem without losing surprise? Can we bypass him? Should we use the staircases? The elevators? What communication? How to synchronize between the three squads? I summarized a general plan and set of fine tuning clarifications we needed from the Mossad, and pointed to some more information needed, But we did not hear from the HQ or Mossad since then.

–It was about five on Saturday evening when I reached the *kirya* in Tel Aviv. When I knocked and entered Dado's office, it was clear I was joining a meeting that was

already well underway. Dado was in his usual seat, behind ~~on the right-hand side of~~ the rectangular table he used for inner circle staff discussions. He was flanked by Talik, and his aide on the right side of the table~~one side~~, and Yona Ephrat with Dado's aide on the other. Across from them was Manno Shaked – the officer who had phoned me to tell me about the Sabena hijacking, and had recently succeeded Raful as *katzhar*, overall chief of the infantry and paratroopers. Beside him were the two Mossad officers with whom I'd had most of my dealings about the apartment blocks in Beirut. They were all poring over a large aerial photograph of the Lebanese capital, with an area marked in dark blue pen around a street called Rue Verdun.

I took one of the remaining chairs. They kept looking at the map. Then Dado looked up at me. " Ehud, Do you know this place?" he asked. 'Yes, I know', I said. 'I'd seen a similar ~~the~~ photo before'. Nodding toward the Mossad men, I said: "These two officers showed it to me. We talked about it, several times during the last~~a~~ few months ~~ago~~."

"Do you have any thoughts ~~idea~~ how to do this operation?" Dado asked. " I have." I answered, "I think we We believe we can do it." I said, adding that we didn't yet have a fully detailed, operational plan. But we'd

looked into the problems we'd face. ' ~~"We believe we can do it."~~ Tell me how did you think you'd do it?', he aske~~sai~~d. I outlined the approach we'd settled on: a small force, probably ~~thirteen~~ fourteen men in all, including two from Mossad to act as drivers, on the ground. We would need the Mossad guys to rent a pair of nice American cars in Beirut, the kind tourists would get. We'd land on the watefront, well south of the most built-up parts, and meet up with the cars. When we reached the apartment blocks, three smaller squad~~group~~s, three people each, would take care of the apartments. Three more men would be outside, to deal with the concierges, or security guards, or any interference, and to command and co-ordinate. We'd leave, from a much closer point, the same way we came in, by sea, taking the drivers with us, if needed, and leaving the cars behind.

Dado nodded, seemed to smile, he was clearly relieved~~as if~~, somehow reassured. I found out later that he'd raised the question before, and everyone around the table thought of ~~asked the same question of Shaked, and that Manno had proposed~~ a classic regular-army raid. A force of 50 or so. ~~They would block the road with~~ Tten armed paratroopers on each end of the street will block

it, with the aim of holding off resistance, while another two dozen will goent in to the apartments and attacked.

I could only assume Dado concluded that it almost certainly wouldn't work, at least not without major trouble. It would certainly forfeit any chance of surprise, and could end with major problem of getting out. He was right. Already during our brainstorming It was very clear we won't be able to rely on any kind of Hillutz in the middle of Beirut. And if we get into trouble we will have to rely on ourselves alone. If anyone *can* be prepared for it, it were us. The Unit.

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"The mission is yours," he said, looking at me. "Manno will be in overall command, offshore. Because we're also planning several other targets."

I've learnt later that facing the accumulated information, Mossad leadership realized that based on their techniques and ***forte****/s* ,there were too many targets, too many weapons as well as too many independent players to plan an operation that will hit all three. Now, if only one would have been hit, the others would leave, change security arrangements around them, and a golden opportunity to hit all three would be lost. That's how they came to us.

Mano came to visit The Unit the next morning, and was genuinely surprised by how much mileage we'd done in planning and understanding the challenge. However a lot of work was still facing us and time was short. The target date we set was 14 days ahead of us.

~~The reason for the urgent summons was that Mossad had confirmed that all three of the Palestinian leaders would be in their apartments in 10 days' time.~~ Amnon Biran was ordered by me to press ~~I spent the next 48 hours pressing~~ for answers to two further questions. The~~n~~ first was, whether ~~if, as I planned, we got to Rue Verdun after midnight,~~ the concierge desks would be staffed. And the second, ~~if we wanted to make our way up to the apartments without using the elevator,~~ whether there was access, which bypasses the concierge, to the interior stairways. The Mossad men said they will do their best to ~~were sure they could~~ get the answers. They didn't say how – though obviously, (they had ears or eyes on the ground – and I didn't ask. All that mattered was that we have the fullest possible picture of the obstacles we were going to have to deal with.)

It was obvious the operation ~~that~~ had every chance of going wrong. In fact, one reason for Dado's "other targets" was to ensure that if it did, there would be

enough successes elsewhere to provide a credible justification for having sent our forces into Beirut in the first place. In fact, as we refined our plan and the Mossad kept passing on further details about the area, new potential snags arose. The main one was the presence of a *gendarmerie*, a Lebanese police post, at the bottom end of the street, 250 yards~~500 feet~~ or so from the apartment houses. Even without that to worry about, we would be operating in a crowded, up-market residential area. We could only hope that at the hour we struck, most people would be in bed. Or out partying. This was pre-civil war Beirut. Not for nothing was it called the Paris of the Middle East.

In the years since, an extraordinary array of stories has grown up around the sayeret's final mission during my term as commander, culminating in the dramatic, largely fictional, version in Stephen Spielberg's 2005 movie, *Munich*. I remember reading in one earlier book, otherwise surprisingly accurate, of the *five weeks* of intensive training I organized before we set off. If only... Even the full 140 days I thought we'd be given would have been a bonus. In fact, we had only half of that to do detailed preparation with the ***full*** team. Our Mossad drivers, European-born Israelis, needed a extra few days to make

their way, through Paris or London, and enter Beirut as tourists, rent the cars, and scout out our planned route from the seashore to Rue Verdun.

There were four other operations planned alongside ours: three by paratroop units, and one by the Shayetet 13 SEALs, against a series of Fatah and Democratic Front installations. Though all of them, like ours, would need help from the SEALs in getting ashore, only one needed direct co-ordination with the Mossad and with us. This was an attack on a DFLP HQ building, a mile or so away from us in southern Beirut, to be led by Amnon Lipkin, a gifted courageous paratroop commander, a couple of years younger than me, who would become a close friend.[EB.My successor as Chief of Staff and later a Minister in my Gov. [Mentioned during the Karameh story).EB.] Amnon's force would land along with us, and also pile into Mossad rental cars. The aim was to make sure that both of our attacks started at the same time, with the maximum prospect that each of us could retain the advantage of surprise.

The targets were Three : Mohammed Youssef al-Najar, or Abu Youssef, a leading operations officer in Black September responsible also for operations in the West Bank. He lived on the sixth floor of the southern

building. He was somewhat more complicated target, I put Muki to deal with him; Kamal Adwan, one of Arafat's top military planners; and Kamal Nasser, a member of Arafat's leadership circle and his main spokesman. They lived on the third and fourth floors respectively of an adjucant building to the north. I gave command of thise other two attack teams to a pair of officers named Amitai Nachmani and Zvika Gilad. Both were young, self-confident, natural leaders. Both also possessed other qualities I knew we'd need in Beirut: seriousness, thoughtfulness, and calm. I would take charge on the street, along with Amiram Levin, with whom I'd worked longer and more closely than anyone else in the sayeret. With us would be Dov Bar, a courageous, sincere SEALs Major,officer who we knew from our canal and red sea operations in the War of Attrition. And our fightingchief medic,Dr. Shmuel Katz. Just in case.

I let them each to recommend another two officers or soldiers they want for their squad and bring it to my approval. It now became clear , that Mossad can not assure its' agents would rent station wagons , which could carry 6-7 beyond driver. I couldn't be flexible to change it once we've landed, so we turned to plan on three full-size cars rather than two station-wagons. It left some more space.

(planning challenges, the targets, three cars, enable ?one more guy,ingrams, cloth buying, repetitions. Gorodish.small explosives, Uzi Yairi.briefing in Mossad. Moral issue, Amitai. Operation.flowWhen, and if, we both had completed the operations and got away safely, we would meet up again on the seafront.

The training may not have been long, but it was as intensive, and as realistic, as weI could make it.. From our first planning meeting back at Kav Chamesh, the morning after Dado had given me the go-ahead, I realized I'd have to make at least one change to the plan I'd given him. It had been based on three strike teams hitting the apartments, plus a command unit of four on the street below. Instead of thirteen, I now decided we'd be fourteen in all. There was no way, after Sabena, that I could refuse Yoni when he pressed to be included. I added him to Mookie Betzer's force. I gave command of the other two attack teams to a pair of officers named Amitai Nachmani and Zvika Gilad. Both were young, self-confident, natural leaders. Both also possessed other qualities I knew we'd need in Beirut: seriousness, thoughtfulness, and calm. I would take charge on the street, along with Amiram Levin, with whom I'd worked longer and more closely than anyone else in the sayeret.

~~With us would be Dov Bar, a SEALs officer who we knew from our canal operations in the War of Attrition. And our chief medic, Shmuel Katz. Just in case.~~

Outside ~~In~~ the big hangar at Sirkin, we made mock-ups of the layout of each of the three apartments, using ~~bedsheets~~Yuttah-sacks shits for the walls and refining the dimensions as further bits of intelligence came in from Mossad. We discussed the weapons and focused on Ingram, which was a really miniature sub-machine gun, easy to hide under our clothes, then having found that they easily stopped arbitrarily while shooting, we turned back to Mini –Uzis, but without the butts. Then, we located a new housing development in Ramat Aviv, in northern Tel Aviv, with a pair of 10-storey apartment blocks still under construction. For three consecutive nights we were rehearsing the critical stage of disembarking from the cars. Walking ‘naturally’ into the buildings, climbing, using penlights through the dark staircases, and trying to synchronize the activation of the tiny explosive charges we planned to put on each door, then, the action itself. Sometimes with our own Unit’s soldiers “playing the Targets, body guards, or family members. Adding to it the training for a rich variety of all sorts of interventions, surprises and mishaps.

Dado, Mano and Gorodish, now head of training and doctrine in the HQ watched us closely for an hour or two each night ,then left us to continue. It was Dado who identified one main problem I'd overlooked. We would be entering Beirut dressed as civilians, of course. Once we enter Rue Verdun, we planned to stop on its' side streets, disembark, and approach the apartment houses, a 250 feet or so away, on foot, as if we were a simply a bunch of party-goers coming home after a night on the town. "It doesn't look right, might draw attention or raise suspicion" Dado said. "More than a dozen party people walking, all *men and young*?" I think it was Mookie who suggested the answer: 'Some of us can go as young women'. The three least tall and burly-looking of us volunteered. A boyish looking guy named Lonny Rafael. Amiram. And me.

We were well into the second week of training. No day no night for rest. 20-21 working hours a day. I dealt with just 14 of my soldiers and few staff officers. I left all my other responsibilities and The Unit, to my deputy, Yoni, who was doing a very good job.

I was preparing my personal gear and mini Uzi for a live fire rehearsal and worst case scenarios training, in Sanur, a deserted Jordanian police fortress in north Samaria. Yoni came in, with a sad look on his handsome

face, and in a very grave tone told me: Ehud, I have a serious request. I want you to order me into the operation.’ Trying to watch my response, he added: “You turned me down in Sabena, now I want to join.” It was not really a valid argument. Yoni later commanded, replacing me, the abduction of the Syrian officers, as well as other operations in between. But he probably thought I recorded Sabena as an event that might make me feel indebted. “ I know, you are ***all*** well into the training” he added “And although I think I could take command of any of those squads, I don’t ask for it now” he paused for a moment, trying to judge whether to continue “ I ask you to put me as a simple soldier, member of one of the squads. I cannot afford not participating in such a unique operation”. It was clear he couldn’t join so late as acommander of any squad. We’d already made too long way into it. Nothing short of compelling urgency could change it. Yoni’s readiness to join as a simple soldier was somewhat different. Deserved a thought. He was a seasoned commander and fighter. We still had almost a week of preparation ahead. At this late stage, I could not remove any soldier who is already trained. Buy we had now more place on the cars, and the adding a fourth member for Muki’s squad for example, was not necessarily a bad idea.

I noticed through experience, that in small teams facing extremely risky missions and high level uncertainty, high percentage of fighting officers provides a more agile, adaptive, flexible and daring combination. Out of instinct we already had 7 officers out of 15 in Sabena. Now we already planning to have 9 officers out of 13, is it that bad to have 10 officers, the extra one Yoni, out of 14? ‘Well’. I told Yoni, ‘I would not impose you on any squad commander at this stage. If Muki would be ready, you are in’. Yoni was happy as I couldn’t see him for long time. He was not just my Deputy. He was a close friend. I knew he and muki highly appreciate each other. If Muki would reject him, I could still take him into the street level squad of mine.

Muki did. He became the fourth soldier of Muki’s squad.

~~T~~But t**he real work involved** also **simulating the whole operation, from the moment of our landing, on jet-black rubber dinghies piloted by the SEALs. We did an initial exercise** just to polish the landing stage, in Atlit. The SEALs base. Then, next night, the last night before the drivers had to leave to Europe ~~for the approach by sea in Haifa. Then, we located a new development in Ramat Aviv, in northern Tel Aviv, with a pair of 10-storey apartment~~

~~blocks still under construction. Two nights in a row,~~ **we ran through the whole thing: shoving off in the dinghies from a navy missile boat a half-mile off the Israeli coast shortly before midnight, meeting up with our Mossad drivers on the shore, making our way through the** outskirts of Haifa ~~center of Tel Aviv~~ **to** ~~the~~ some **apartment complexes, and simulating the attack.** Then back to the shore carrying some 'wounded' soldiers, back to the dinghies, the sea disturbingly high, and up to the missile boat deck. Not an easy experience for 'stable ground' animals.

It was not clear ~~The idea, beyond practicing for the assault itself, was to see~~ **whether we could pull off the whole thing without anyone along the way into the area raising an alarm. The one hitch came in the second run-through. An Israeli police** car stopped us for having two people sitting by the driver at the front seat, it was illegal. ~~man~~ **drove by as we were "attacking" the apartments. Fortunately,** Mano, ~~Dado,~~ **who was on hand for the exercises, managed to convince him that reporting us to his superiors would not be a particularly good career move.**

A further funny, but risky moment reported, when the 'guys' went to buy civilian clothes, 'Beirut-style". They

came together,some ten of them. Seemingly knowing each other, and insisting on Jackets 2-3 numbers wider than their actual sizes. Even the old owner of this respected Tel Aviv men's fashion shop, found courage to tell them upon their leaving: "good luck!". It was a mistake of us, dilitants, which could be costly. Could not have happened to Mossad. We, the 'girls' didn't face similar challenge. We let our secretaries to take measures of us, and sent them to buy the clothes, of bigger sizes for their'Mother' or 'Older sister.

~~It was Dado who identified one main problem I'd overlooked. We would be entering Beirut dressed as civilians, of course. Once we got to the top, northern end of Rue Verdun, we planned to approach the apartment houses, a hundred feet or so away, on foot, as if we were a simply a bunch of party-goers coming home after a night on the town. "It doesn't look right," Dado said. "More than a dozen party people walking, all *men*?" I think it was Mookie who suggested the answer: the three least tall and burly-looking of us would go as women. A boyish looking guy named Lonny Rafael. Amiram. And me.~~

~~There was another, deeper, issue, however.~~ [0]Though at first no one raised it directly, all of us were aware of it~~. I'd tried, in our meetings as the actual attack~~

~~drew closer, to address it. This would be unlike anything Sayeret Matkal had done before. It was not just the small matter of operating in the very heart of a city the size of Tel Aviv. This time, the target was not a communications cable. Or a hijacked airliner. Or even a convoy of Syrian officers we set out to capture and abduct. In all of those operations, we'd known that we might end up having to fight, to shoot, and, if necessary, to kill.~~ [1]Now, we would be targeting three specific men. We had black-and-white photos of each of them~~.: Mohammed Youssef al-Najar, or Abu Youssef, an operations officer in Black September; Kamal Adwan, one of Arafat's top military planners; and Kamal Nasser, a member of Arafat's leadership circle and his main spokesman.~~ Nominally, it was assumed ~~understood that~~ we might ~~would merely~~ seize them if possible].(~~I even had us exercise how we'd do that: subduing, handcuffing, and removing each of the three and bringing them back with us to Israel.~~ [2]But none of us – and certainly not Dado, ~~or~~ the Mossad or Golda – seriously believed that once our teams had made it into the apartments, any of the three Palestinians would simply (?)surrender. We did not expect to have any realistic option but to kill them.]

~~The killing itself was not the issue. After all, I had drawn up a plan a year earlier to assassinate Yasir Arafat himself. Though I am certain that none of us in the sayeret ever took any pleasure in having to take a life, at the end of the day,~~[3] Wwe were a part of the Israeli army, acting under totally understandable directives of a freely elected government. Black September, and Arafat's Fatah more broadly, were not only at war with the very existence of Israel. They'd been behind an escalating campaign of attacks against Israeli civilians. The purpose was not revenge, per se. It was more than any thing else a pre-emption strike against further terror attacks, we knew were in the planning, and deterrence. Revenge and punishment per se, could not justify it. In fact, just few month ago I've raised a plan to kill Arafat. I asked for this decision of higher echelons, based on my feeling that there is here reson d'etat, based on pre-emption and deterrence. At that case, the answer wwas negative. Don't do it. In this case, the answer/directive was : do it. It was fully legitimate.].

~~The uneasiness, as the Beirut attack drew nearer, revolved around what I'd extolled as the "spirit" of the~~

~~unit in my comments after I became commander. I did not have to spell out what it meant. In truth, I'm not sure it is possible to define it precisely. It was a mix of qualities, of which personal courage was the most obvious to outsiders yet probably the least important. Our image of ourselves was as a unit where the frontal cortex mattered more than biceps.~~ [4][EB. Ned. Tim, let's leave it for later time. That's not exactly the same case. A government can decide for reson d'etat to order a killing of concretely known terroerist whose future activities risk their citizens: Munich perpetrators, Osama Bin Laden etc. Using secret services, SEALs teams, Drones or Sayeret Matkal. The case in the Bus 300 was different it had to do with people who clearly tried to execute unlawful or even terror act, during the operation you might kill them without any regrets but once they are not dangerous, you should bring them to justice. not shooting them. Amitai represented an over sensitivity in a way. Which I should admit, I liked. He did not question the right of GOLDA OR dado to make a decision like the ones Obama made many times. Or myself in later years. He just demanded to be assured that THEY had contemplated it seriously before an order was issued.EB.]

~~We were *thinking* soldiers, meticulously drilled and trained for every operation, but aware that only if every single one of us was capable of showing the initiative of a field commander would we succeed as a team. And there was, underlying all of this, what the British would describe as a spirit of the fair play. We might kill. But we were not *killers*. It was an ethos that would form part of a major Israeli political controversy years later, by which time I was chief of military intelligence, during a sayeret attack to free a hijacked civilian bus, when we captured, rather than kill, two of the Palestinian terrorists. And it was an ethos that, just a couple of days before the Beirut mission, asserted itself now.~~

[5]In my mind, as I explained to all ~~each of~~ the men I'd be leading into Beirut, the judgement, of which I agreed, by Mossad, Dado, and ultimately Golda that these three Palestinians were appropriate targets in the wake of Munich. ~~was something I accepted]~~ . ~~As a battalion-level commander in the army, I did not feel that was my call to make, unless we'd been ordered to execute an attack that was clearly improper or immoral. In that case, as everyone knew, I'd have said no from the outset. On a decidedly lesser ethical issue, when asked to bend the truth about our downing of the Libyan airliner only a~~

~~few months before, I'd refused. I also stressed, especially to the team commanders, that~~[6] I, as I knew was the case with Dado, viewed what we were being asked to do not as a ~~simple~~ revenge, but as an important preemption,and deterren~~t~~ce.] ~~It was a way of driving home the point to potential future terrorists that massacres such as the one in Munich would not go unpunished.~~

~~The more difficult question, however, was *how* we were delivering that message: breaking into apartments in the middle of the night. Yes, each of the men was almost certain to be armed, or to have armed security guards nearby. But these flats were their homes. Very likely, members of their families would be there. And if the operation went as planned, since we would have the advantage of surprise, it was hard to imagine how any of the men would have a chance of surviving. My answer was that, of course, ideally we would face them down on the equivalent of a battlefield. Yet by the very nature of Fatah, and especially Black September, that was not going to happen. Mossad was right: this was the only realistic way to isolate and attack them.~~

[8]For Amitai Nachmani, my words were not enough. ~~Twice, he came to see me privately after our run-throughs.~~ It was not that he didn't trust~~, or respect,~~

me. ~~as his commander, Hh~~e said, ~~.~~ But that this decision shouldn't be mine. It belongs to higher, political echelons. He asked that before leading his team into Beirut, he deserved being ~~needed to~~ satisfied~~y~~ himself that the people we were attacking, and the way we were attacking them, had been properly thought through by the people giving us the orders. I told him I understood. I did not tell him that I was actually proud of him for asking – which, although I'm sure that he sensed it anyway, was an omission I regretted, when he, like many of my friends, lost his life in the Sinai Desert just a few months later. But I did go to Dado. I told him what Amitai had said. Dado, if only because he was an old Palmachnik, needed no convincing when I urged him to ~~come~~ address the officers on this issue, when he comes for~~–~~ ~~entire Beirut team at~~ our final briefing.He did.~~planning meeting.~~

We set off, all five different forces, in several~~a pair of~~ missile boats, from Haifa, on the afternoon of April ninth 73'for. All my force in one boat. ~~from Haifa on the afternoon of April ninth~~. I was only half-joking when I told Mookie, as we boarded, that I was more worried about seasickness than *Sabha Settash* – Squad

Seventeen, Arafat's own commando force. But the Mediterranean was calm as we headed west, towards Cyprus, before circling back in the direction of the Lebanese coast after nightfall.– I tried to rest a little bit,and spent short time exchanging few remarks with squad commanders.~~After running through detailed assignments a final time with every member of the team~~,More than an hour before landing, I joined Amiram and Lonny in transforming ourselves as best we could into credible dates for the evening. I'd vetoed dresses or high heels, in favor of stylishly flared slacks which went wider towards the shoes, and very low heels. ~~and flats~~. We used pairs of standard-issue grey army wool socks to pad out our bras. We took two of our soldier secretaries, young girls, ~~The Mossad had kindly recruited a volunteer from a Tel Aviv beauty parlor~~ to help us with our lipstick,make up, (Amiram had a scar on face), blue eyeliner, and eye shadow. The final touch was our wigs: Amiram and Lonny were blondes. I went as a brunette.

[EB. I wonder whether this helps a book written by me]I'm reluctant to take issue with the Spielberg version of events – if only because he had my part played by someone undeniably better looking than I was even then, (?

is this relevant? Interesting or funny?)the Israeli actor and singer Jonathan Rozen (I never even knew who was the actor). But in *Munich*, we are shown zooming into a crowded harbor area on a line of motor boats, changing into drag only once we've sprinted ashore, then opening fire on a dockside kiosk and shooting our way into town like something out of the wild west. Had any of that happened, we could never reach the place and having the terrorists still there. Besides, we would have started a small-scale war, not to mention run the very real risk of not getting out alive.EB. till here.]

In fact, we left our ~~the~~ missile boat, (? I don't recall whether Manno's, was our boat. I think , it was NOT.) ~~Manno's offshore command post,~~ in our motor dinghies far out of earshot of Beirut. Just before we climbed down from the missile boat, I've got a codded message from Manno, on his floating offshore command post nearby, meaning that: 'our colleagues believe all three are at home now'. For the first time in months it became final. We are going for the action tonight. I felt elated. Very low hum of the engine, although the sea was relatively quiet and we sailed slowly, from time to time a flipping wave would hit our thighs, reminding us how farsighted we

were at wrapping ourselves up to breasts in Nylon bags. The view Beirut at night, bright, heavily lit, ,huge in size, Hanged over the hills with some strips climbing up the mountains around it ,was overwhelming. More so as we came closer. I felt calm and confident. All of us, including the “women”, were wrapped in plastic ponchos, our legs into nylon sacks, to avoid showing up on Rue Verdun soaking wet. Our SEAL pilots steered us well away from the more built-up part of the seafront, towards the ‘Coral Beach’, one of the private clubs on the southern edge of the city’s shoreline. We landed outside the wave-braker of a small private marina–like bathing beach, less than two miles south of the heavily built city. An area of many embassies and several resorts. –The dinghies came almost ashore ~~After getting out of the dinghies~~, But we, the ‘women’ ~~we~~ were carried ~~ashore~~ by the SEALs to make sure we’d stay dry. All of us had loose-fitting jackets. The attack teams used them to conceal mini-Uzis, tiny-explosive charges, specially developed with built-in adhesive bands, to blow the locks on the apartment doors.~~–if they couldn’t be forced open, a~~ Few small, special hand grenade~~ or two~~, ~~–~~as well as pen~~flash~~lights for the dash up the stairs once they got inside. ~~One member E~~of ~~e~~ach team also had a several~~large~~ plastic bags, provided

by the SEALs, which could be easily water-proof locked, with orders to take away any easily accessible documents for Intelligence ~~Mossad~~ analysts back home. As the mother of the brood, I had, beyond my mini-Uzi, munitions and some grenades, a large purse as well, in which I carried our two-way radio to communicate with the squad ~~team~~ leaders, and Mano at ~~or~~ the missile boat ~~if necessary~~.

~~Our SEAL pilots steered us well away from the more built-up part of the seafront, towards the Coral Beach, one of the private clubs on the southern edge of the city's shoreline. A few hundred yards out, they cut the engines, paddling in the rest of the way~~. Six American full-size cars, several of them~~Four~~ Buick Skylarks ~~station wagons~~ were waiting when we clambered ashore, three~~wo~~ of them for us and three~~wo~~ for Amnon's force, which was of the same size~~squad~~. Amnon set off east toward the DFLP target, in Fakahani, not far from the main sports stadium and a pair of Beirut landmarks which would send shockwaves through the world a decade later: the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila.

We turned north, towards the center of town. (?)In the Spielberg film, my one spoken line is to greet my driver, with the memorable(?) line: "Ehud Barak." Yet of course, we'd already met – in the run-through exercises

in Ramat Aviv. ~~After W~~We got into the cars, I'm stuck between Muki and the driver, the rest of Muki's squad, Lonny, Zvika Livneh and Yoni in the back seat. I looked backwards, the other two cars, behind us. "Go!" I told the driver (Ahrale Livnat, was his name), "How is the way?" he ~~I asked him how his scouting of the route had gone. He~~ didn't drive, but answered~~said~~: "I drove it three times. I know the way, ~~, basically, OK,~~ but there are ~~that he'd noticed~~ a couple of Gendarmeres~~cops~~, armed with sub-machine guns, patrolling near the top of Rue Verdun. – I saw them twice, including an hour ago"~~on one of his drive-bys~~. He looked somewhat worried. That was something we hadn't expected: the *gendarmerie* was on the other end of the street. What could have caused it? What will happen if I report it now? – I noticed that Muki, besides me turned alerted, I told the driver again: "Go!". First decision made.~~But I assured him it would be fine, that there would be no reason for a policeman to suspect what we were up to, or who we were.~~ We started driving and within minutes found ourselves into flowing traffic of post-midnight big cosmopolitan city. Drivers bypassing us, or standing besides us in the red lights till it turned green. It was reassuring by its very normalcy. Still, I could tell the driver was nervous. "What's wrong?" I asked. He hesitated

before replying. “I’ve told you. There are gendarmeres with weapons at ‘our‘ street”. Then overcoming his hesitation he added “ I served in the Nahal, I’d~~ve~~ never been under ~~in a place where there is~~ live fire before,” he said. –Patting him on the shoulder, I told him:” don’t ~~not to~~ worry.– You won’t be tonight either, we’ll leave you in the side street, as planned.~~He *still* wouldn’t be~~, ~~when this was over. “Remember. While we’re doing the operation, you’re going to be parked around the corner, until it’s over. Then, it’s just about getting home.”~~

Driving to the place/our destination,took some ten minutes. When we rounded the corner at the top of –Verdun, it was about ten minutes after one in the morning. Our cars pulled over as planned into the side street. We got out, and I nonchalantly got hugged around my waists by~~took~~ Mooki~~e’s arm~~ as we began walking the 2~~1~~50 feet or so to the first of the apartment buildings. Behind us, the others followed in loose knots of two other couples also intimately hugging each other, mingled along the sidewalk(?) with half a dozen other ~~two or three~~males. Both Mookie and I noticed~~saw~~ a pair of gendarmeres~~lone policeman~~ approaching on the sidewalk. “Ignore him,” I whispered. We weaved a few inches to the side –of the pair~~to let him pass~~. So did the rest of the group a moment

later. First hurdle left behind us. Let’s hope they’ll prefer to flee when shooting would start.

The street was quiet. No car yet passed. Fade light from few lamps at relatively long distance from each other. My first impression of the buildings was ‘‘wow!’. That’s really a style’. Dimensions were exactly what we expected,recently built, with their glassed-in lobbies set back from a covered terrace in front. but nothing like those generous, fully lit, floor to ceiling glassed-in, lobbies, set back from a covered terrace in front, which I’d ever seen, till then, in Tel Aviv, not to mention MH. I’ve noticed we couldn’t see a concierge in the first building, were the third and fourth floors had the terrorists of Amitai and Zvika Gilad. (And no grey Mercedes parking), no any guard at sight. In seconds we’ve reached Muki’s building. Again, no concierge in sight. I’ve asked myself ‘Are we wrong on info? Is the concierge on a night brake? two of them?’. There was no way nor time, to answer. Let’s move forward, I thought. We pushed the Glass door, it was unlocked. Good, quiet start. Not for long. “Go ahead!” I told Muki, and within seconds he, with his expanded squad, including Yoni, disappeared into the dark staircase, making their way up, to the sixth

floor to hit Abu Yousef Nagar, head of Operations of ‘Black September’.

I was now alone outside. A young, brunette, modern looking woman, on the street of a dormant, yet alive and alien city. I looked around curiously. Within twenty seconds Amiram, the stocky blonde joined me, followed by two bigger size young men,(Dov and Shmulik) who stood separately some twenty yards from us

~~adjacent buildings were exactly as we’d expected: recently built, with their glassed-in lobbies set back from a covered terrace in front. As the other teams made their way to the second building, I stayed with Mookie. His job, along with Yoni in his expanded team, was to deal with Abu Youssef, the Black September operations officer, on the sixth floor. If the concierge was still on duty, he was on a break. The lobby was empty. The door was unlocked, so they sprinted toward the interior staircase and made their way up.~~

Kamal Adwan~~Adan~~, the Fatah military man, and Kamal Nasser both lived one over the other in the other building.~~next door~~. Adwan, Amitai’s target, was on the ~~s~~third~~econd~~ (?)floor. Nasser was on the (?) fourth~~third~~. In the corner of my eye I’ve noticed that Amitai and Gilad squads had also entered their building undisrupted.

As the two other attack teams non chalantly entered raced into the other building lobby, we knew they will race up, once in the staircase.,

Amiram and I posted ourselves near one of the terrace pillars in front of Abu Youssef's building, occasionally exchanging a few words of what I hoped would pass as girl talk. The cars were around the corner some 90 yards from us. Dov, the SEAL veteran, and Dr Katz were near the gap between the two buildings some 20 yards from ustop end of the street, as lookouts. And we seemed, on the face of it, seconds away from beginning what had all the makings of the operation we'd rehearsed back in Ramat Aviv. The one major problem I'd expected – security guards posted somewhere in the area –. hadn't materialized. We'd been told by the Mossad to look out for a grey Mercedes, but it wasn't there.

As we'd planned things, the next stage was for each of the team leaders to press the transmit button three times on their radios. When I'd heard from all of them, I would send a rapid signal back. Then, at the countdown of five, each of them was supposed to activate the tiny explosive, already attached to the door. Ten seconds later,a simultaneous explosion, would start the attack.

Mookie's signal came first. Yet before either of the other two teams had checked I, the trouble began. We had still seen no sign of the gray Mercedes. But suddenly, the door of a red Renault flew open almost directly across the street from where Amiram and I were standing. A medium height~~tall~~, sturdy, dark skin, dark-haired man with a black middle eastern moustache climbed out. He looked across at us. He opened his brown leather jacket. Then, he pulled out a pistol and started to cross the street. "*Ein breirah*," I whispered to Amiram. "No choice." To this day, I remember the shock on the man's face/ in the men eyes(/) as he watched us – this pair of 20 ~~30~~something women – open our jackets, and pull out mini Uzis.

Fortunately for him, we'd had to make allowances for concealment in choosing our weapons for Beirut. We'd had to leave the Uzis' (Butt)?) stabilizing shoulder braces behind. But even with reduced accuracy, at this distance, he was in trouble. As our first shots hit, he had already half-turned to run and, though obviously wounded, somehow got back into the car. We kept shooting. But he even managed to drag himself out of the far door. and then roll behind a knee~~waist~~-high wall on the other side of the street. And one of our shots obviously hit the electrical

innards of the Renault, because the car horn began blaring full-blast, as if someone had set off a modern-day car alarm.

So much for the element of surprise.

I do remember noticing that three sets of lights had suddenly come on in the otherwise dark apartment buildings: in the very flats that Mossad had identified for us. At least that part of the plan was intact. These were the Palestinians we were after, and it seemed they were at home. Second later, I heard a single explosion. It was from Abu Youssef's apartment, the one Mookie and Yoni had been assigned. Then, bursts of gunfire from the building next door.

But now, some minute and a half after we started shooting, a Land Rover was approaching from the *gendarmerie* at the bottom of the road. He drove relatively slowly in the not so wide street, with a continuum of parking cars at the other side of the road from us. We waited until they were about 650 feet from us. Amiram and I opened fire first, then, from a dozen yards ~~feet~~ behind us, Dov and Dr. Shmuel Katz as well. The driver lost control. The car veered left ~~right~~, crashing into the parking cars ~~side of the security guard's Renault~~. There were at least four other gendarmeres ~~policemen~~ inside,

however, and they also rolled behind the wall on the far side of the street. Using the terrace columns for cover, we kept shooting. Within a minute or so, only a couple of the gendarmerescops were still firing back.

The three Palestinians, though they could not know the reason for the gunfire and the wailing of the car horn, were now obviously on their guard. When Mookie had blown open the door to Abu Youssef's flat – and he, Yoni and the other two members of his team ran into the apartment – he saw the Black September man peering out from the bedroom. Mookie raised his Uzi but the Palestinian ducked inside and shut the door. Muki All four of them fired through through the door. Other two joined. When they went in, they found not only Abu Youssef, but his wife, both dead, on the floor.

When Zvika's team burst in on Kamal Nasser, he, too, was ready for them. He was hiding, Crouching under a bed.behind a desk, he raised an automatic pistol and fired, hitting grazing one of the team on the leg. But in a burst of Uzi bullets, he, too, was killed.

Amitai's demand for a face-to-face meeting with Dado, I suspect, and the allaying of his doubts about the mission, may well have saved his life. When he and his team exploded the doorcornered Kamal Adwan, the Fatah

officer stood in front of them, ~~had~~ an AK-47 raised in his hands, ready to fire. Without even a split second's, unconscious, hesitation, Amitai fired first. His one regret, afterwards, was that ~~Adwan's wife and children saw it all happen – and~~ when they'd blasted open the apartment door, the force also blew open the door of a nearby flat 2 yards apart, separated just by the corridor, killing an elderly Italian woman. (Worse, it (turned out), according to foreign sources ,~~that~~ she had been one of Mossad's sources for confirming that – the terrorists are at home.)~~Adwan was actually in Beirut~~.

Mookie's team came back down first. They joined us, crouching behind the columns, as sporadic shots continued from one of the policeman behind the wall across the street. When a second gendarmery~~police~~ Land Rover approached when it was some 50 yards from us~~, I at first signaled the others to let it pass. But as it suddenly accelerated toward us,~~ we opened fire. It swerved, crashing into the parking cars ~~rear bumper~~ some 20 yards behind~~of~~ the other one. I felt very calm, calculated and in control. Observing immediately any nuance in the developing situation. And acting upon it. It somewhat surprised, more strongly satisfied me. I felt that it was partly because we discussed and rehearsed on the

ground ,or in the buildings, so many variations of it. And that I had around me ***really***, the best people I could have thought of, for such a mission.

The other teams were back down now. And quietly reported to me: ‘mission accomplished. A lot of documents’. It was important. That what held them for longer time. Muki made a decision, to give up documents and show up earlier, downstairs. I shouted for Dov, who was further up the street, to have the drivers to bring the carsstation wagons from around the corner. Amiram and muki charged to the other side of the street to make sure, the first guard will not shoot us in the back while organizing. When we’d all piled in and began to pull away Yoni did not yet climbed our car. We had to stop and bring him in., however, by then a third police Land Rover appeared. It sped up behind us. myself and few others shot at it.I doubt my few bursts of Uzi fire hit anyone inside. But Mookie tossed back a hand grenade.it stopped them for a moment, which we used to fast driving leave the arena The last thing I saw as we made it to the end of the block and headed back toward the seafront, was the front end of the vehicle exploding.

OurWe last car dropped, as planned, hollow, needle-sharp spikes out the window of the rear station wagon as

we left. So I knew that any ~~other~~ pursuing vehicle, as well as some innocent ones would be in no shape to follow us for very long. But the next~~real~~ problem, now, was ahead of us: avoiding trouble as we made our way back out the the waiting rubber boats. It was already more than 10 minutes since shooting started. All security bodies in the city, were now aware, of something violent happened. I assumed Amnon too was acting. Even in the original plan it did not make sense to drive back to 'Coral Beach'. We asked the SEALs to wait us 20 minutes after we left Coral Beach in the other place. We ~~Even had things gone perfectly to plan, I knew it would be a risk to go all the way back to the Coral Beach, since there was always the possibility someone would have raised the alarm there. So we~~ chose, in advance~~were~~ to take~~aking~~ the shortest route to the sea, straight out to the Corniche, the city's main, palm-bordered avenue along the Mediterranean. As we got closer, we could hear scattered gunfire. Obviously, the police, armed forces, and the Palestinian militias as well, now *all* realized *something* was not right~~. The key advantage we retained was that they would have no idea what had actually happened on Verdun. Who we were, or where we were now going.~~

Still, we weren't safe yet. No sooner had we joined the Corniche, than I saw another police or army Land Rover, about 200 yards ahead of us. This one had a spotlight on the roof, panning both sides of the road. I told the driver to slow down. Take it easy. Keep our distance. About 1500 yards or so later, reaching the place where we'd planned told the rubber dinghies to wait, he and the other cars station wagon slowly pulled over to the side of the road. The Land Rover kept driving. All of us now got out. We left the cars. Took the drivers with us. We slid down a steep embankment, nearly 30 feet high, to the sand strip closer to the water, sea. Two of the three assault teams/squads had big plastic bags full of documents as well, tightly locked. Few friendly SEALs were waiting us on the sand, with saving wests. For the drivers as well. But to avoid risking discovery, we swam together with the SEALs some the 1100 feet or so to the dinghies. When we had hoisted ourtselves in, they headed out, to the missile boat. The first by paddle and only later under softly humming engine sound shadowed by the hum of the awakening city. It was 130am. Just 30 minutes after we landed. power, (to the missile boat. The whole operation had taken about a half an hour), only 910 minutes of fightingthat on Rue Verdun itself. We fully

completed the mission. Three terrorists killed. As well as some eight Gendarmeres. Several probably wounded. The wife of Abu Yousef Nagar, unfortunately killed, and probably the guard. We did not know at the time of the Italian old women. We collected a lot of material to be later analysed. It helped to validate even more the pre-emptive aspect of this operation in blocking future, yet unrealized, terror attacks.

I radioed Manno, immediately on the way to the corniche, ~~missile boat~~. Just a half-dozen words – the agreed code phrase for “mission accomplished, targets achieved.” I could hear the relief in his voice when he replied. At first, I assumed that was mostly because they hadn’t heard from me ~~us~~ during the operation itself. Our radio link with the floating command post had gone down, just after I reported: ‘starting to drive’, as soon as we entered the built-up area – after leaving Coral Beach ~~around the apartment blocks~~ – *genuinely*, this time, despite Manno’s natural suspicion that I’d somehow cut it on purpose. Yet he had other, more serious, reasons to exhale when he did finally hear we’d got out safely. When we were back on the missile boat, I learned that Amnon’s team had had a much tougher time. They’d met strong resistance from the moment they arrived at the DFLP

building. Two of his men, both officers, were killed. Another was badly wounded. They did somehow manage, on the last drops of courage and devotion, yo complete the mission, ~~to~~ set off their explosive charges and destroy the FDP command post. But they had to fight their way in and out. They only barely managed to disengage~~escape~~, carrying their fallen comrades with them, and link up with another team of SEALs near the Coral Beach.

We met Amnon and Manno, (as well as SHaul Ziv of the seals and Amos yaron) Only in Haifa. Already on Fatigue uniform.Our faces in pictures taken there tell the story. Pride of the achievement. Sorrow for the price. Confidence in the future.

It was a little before six in the morning when I got back home in Tel Aviv. I was careful not to wake Nava. Fortunately, I'd changed out of my slacks and flats, and surrendered my wig on the missile boat. But I couldn't summon the energy to deal with my makeup. The next thing I remember was my wife standing by our bed as I slowly stirred awake, around noon the next day. She looked at my eye makeup and lipstick, shook her head, and smiled. She didn't need to ask me where I'd been: Israel radio had been full of news about a "major overnight operation" in Beirut.

* * *

Six ~~A few~~ weeks later, I ended my term as commander of Sayeret Matkal. The handover to my successor, Giora Zorea, turned out to be more elaborate than my arrival two years earlier, though not at my instigation. Dado, along with Talik and of course Ze'ira and Avraham, showed up, and Dado presented me with my fifth T*salash.* It was not for Beirut. Not for the operation against the Syrian officers, who we were now about the swap for our captive pilots in Damascus. Nor for the unprecedented access our T-cable missions was providing into Egypt's military communications. It was, Dado said, for all of the above. (Ehud Brog's achievments in Operations and contribution to the National Security of Israel, as a Commander of The Unit.) ~~all of the above.~~ And it was not just for leading the unit of which I'd been a part almost from the beginning. It was for my role in transforming it and bringing it to full maturity. When I replied, I am sure everyone (narcicism?)felt I was speaking from the heart, in saying that my every moment with the sayeret had been a privilege. And that this latest military commendation

was not a recognition of my achievements. It was a fitting, welcome, award for Sayeret Matkal.

Dado did me another good turn as well. As my stint as commander drew to an end, I knew what I hoped to do next in the army: to use my grounding in armor to work my way up the command chain in tank units. But first, like past sayeret commanders, it was assumed I would broaden my professional military horizons, and recharge my batteries, by spending time in the US, at the Marine Corps staff college in Quantico, Virginia. That's what all my predecessors , as well as many successors, done. I had other ideas, however. I wanted to exercise other parts of my mind, by doing postgraduate work at a good ~~normal~~ American university.

When I first tried to get Dado to sign off on the request, he said no. One reasons was the norms of the army and the time involved. Quantico would last roughly eleven months. A masters program would take at least twice as long. But even if he was willing to live with that, Dado said the only way he could justify it was by telling the Manpower department of the IDF as ell as the Defense Ministry that I'd be coming back to work in R&D, or at least in some area of the military related to what I'd be studying in America. "I don't care what we~~you~~ tell them,"

I said. “Let them wWrite whatever will help it ~~you want. happen.~~ But y~~Y~~ou’re the chief of staff. ~~It’s on~~ So, ~~ly~~ to protect ***my*** integrity, ~~for the sake of being honest that~~ I need~~want~~ *you* to know that when I return, I intend to go back into the command chain. That’s were I belong to. It makes no sense for me to stay in the Army, If I’m ***not*** there’. Dado did not yet said he is ready to allow me to go to a University and did not explicitly answered my question about future direction. As if not to leave a record of inconsistency. But my instinct told me that he understood.

In a less formal tone ,I added: “I respect the Marines. But compared to what I’ll learn at Quantico, going to study at a leading American university, assuming I can get in, is an opportunity I can’t pass up.” Dado said he’d think it over. I mobilized Eli Zeira, who had now for nine months, succeeded Aharon Yariv as head of intelligence, as well. He, in turn, called on the support of a man named Yuval Ne’eman. Ne’eman was Israel’s leading theoretical physicist, and a senior reservist officer, later a politician, extreme right wing. He was president of Tel Aviv University at the time. He was also the son of the industrialist~~engineer~~ to whom my father had

taken me as a boy to see how our kibbutz water-pumps were produced~~designed~~. And eventually, Dado agreed.

I still had to get accepted by an American university, by no means a foregone conclusion. The first step was to take the standard English test for foreigners, TOEFL. Then the post-graduate entry exam, the GRE. There were two parts to GRE ~~it~~. The first involved aptitude test, mathematics and abstract thinking, the second, English language. If my fate had rested on my English grade, I'd have surely ended up at Quantico. I finished in the lower 28th percentile among the roughly 300,000 international applicants that year. But in the other part, I was in the 99.76~~6~~th percentile. I applied to four universities – Harvard, Yale, MIT and Stanford. Amazingly, I got accepted by all of them. I chose Stanford, in part because it allowed a far greater latitude in choosing and shaping my program of study, beyond quantitative courses, so I'd be able to take courses in a wide range of areas. Also, because of the weather.

In early August 1973, Nava and I joined my parents and hers on a sunny afternoon in Mishmar Hasharon to celebrate our daughter Michal's third birthday – and to say goodbye. We were heading to Palo Alto, California,

with every expectation of two years of intellectual stimulation, new friends, new experiences, and something approximating a more normal family life.

My “other” family, the Israeli army, also had reason to believe that a period of new possibilities lay ahead. The threat of terror attacks remained, of course. There had also been a brief bout of nerves, over military maneuvers by Anwar Sadat, Nasser’s successor, just a few weeks earlier. But that had come to nothing. Some historians feel that~~And in no small part due to~~ the high-profile success of the raid on Rue Verdun, helped an emerging sense of~~,~~ superiority, which contributed to Israel’s generals conviction~~felt~~ that the balance of strength, and security, was now firmly on our side. That at least for a while, Israel could breathe easily.

But we were all prove spectacularly, tragically, wrong.